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**The Contribution of Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) to Business  
Leaders in Hong Kong**

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The Contribution of Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA)  
to  
Business Leaders in Hong Kong

by

Wai Keung (John) LEUNG

A dissertation submitted to  
the University of Bristol  
in accordance with the requirements of  
the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Graduate School of Education

March 2019

56495 words

## Abstract

In the last decades, the value of Executive MBA (EMBA) program has been a controversial issue hotly discussed by both researchers and practitioners. Nevertheless, the tuition of EMBA programs is getting higher and higher and has reached more than \$150,000 USD for completing the whole EMBA program. More importantly, it has attracted many influential leaders from different areas to attend the program. So, what exactly are the contributions of the EMBA programs to these leaders?

This research aims to provide insights in understanding the contribution of Executive MBA program to the business leaders in Hong Kong. In particular, it is intended to understand why and how the EMBA programs create impact to the participants.

To achieve the mentioned objectives, this research has used in-depth interview as the research approach to collect data. Thematic analysis has been used to analyze the scripts of the in-depth interviews. First, I have analyzed each individual case to gain insights on what the interviewees consider as valuable. Then, I have conducted a cross-case analysis to identify the common values, and factors facilitating and blocking the EMBA participants to gain those values.

Based on the results of the analysis, I have identified the 12 values that are considered to be impactful to the EMBA learners. These values can be further classified into two types, namely, the source of preparing for the future and the source of transformation. Then, I further discuss how the interviewees have gained the mentioned values. On the other hand, the factors that blocked learners to gain the mentioned values are also discussed.

Based on the research results, recommendations are made to design the curriculum, deliver the program and recruit the right students. Academically, it is expected the results in this research can contribute to shed further insights on transformative learning in the Asian learning culture. Practically, it will serve as guidelines to develop EMBA and other taught post graduate programs.

## Acknowledgement

It has been my dream for a long time to pursue a doctoral degree in education. The experience is as challenging as or even more challenging than my Ph.D. degree in engineering. Being trained and educated as a researcher in Industrial Engineering, I took the challenge to study education, a liberal arts subject which is very different from my primary science and engineering training.

After being a Professor in business school and the EMBA Director for more than 20 years, I still feel that I am lacking of something in nurturing my students. Though I do not know what it is, but I am curious why many students find the EMBA program so valuable, while others just could not get too much out of it. This thesis has provided me the opportunity to reflect and consolidate what I have been experiencing as a higher education teacher.

I am glad that I have finally got the courage to enroll in the Education of Doctorate degree program at Bristol. This has been a tough but meaningful and fruitful journey. It helps me to reflect my teaching methodologies, my relationships with the students and the values of the EMBA program.

I have to thank all my professors who have taught me during my learning journey. In particular, I am in debt to my thesis supervisor, Prof. Lisa Lucas, for her kind encouragement and professional guidance. Her comments have not just shed light to improve my thesis, but also have provided me insights in looking at my research from a different perspective.

Last but not the least, I have to thank my wife, Pauline, who has been supporting me as a professional editor, a research partner and a spouse.

As a Christian, I truly believe that without the grace of my Lord, my thesis can never be completed.

## Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Program and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:

.....

Date: March 2019

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Author's declaration .....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Executive MBA and its Development.....	1
1.2 EMBA in the Context of Hong Kong.....	2
1.3 Rationale of the Study .....	9
1.4 Personal Experiences as an EMBA Director .....	11
1.5 Aims and Objectives.....	14
1.6 Research Questions .....	15
1.7 Significance of the study.....	15
1.8 Summary .....	16
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	17
2.1 Critiques of MBA and EMBA program .....	17
2.2 The Recent Development of MBA and EMBA Programs in China .....	22
2.3 Adult Learning and Transformative Experiences of EMBA.....	26
2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Research .....	45
Chapter 3. Research Methodology.....	53
3.1 Type of Research and its Application.....	53
3.2 Research Strategy .....	54
3.3 Data Collection.....	56
3.4 Data Analysis.....	63
3.5 Ethical Issues.....	67
3.6 Research Positioning.....	69
Chapter 4. Findings: Individual Case Analysis (Entrepreneurs) .....	72
4.1 Mr. James: From Construction worker to Business Owner .....	73
4.2 Ms. Katie: From Business Partner to Business Owner .....	78
4.3 Harry: From traditional owner to delegated businessman .....	82

4.4	Bob: From an Entrepreneur to DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) .....	86
4.5	Christy: From Government Worker to Business Owner .....	90
4.6	Angel: From management consultant to business owner .....	95
4.7	Summary .....	99
Chapter 5.	Individual Case Analysis (Non-entrepreneurs/Senior Executives).....	101
5.1	Tommy: From Technical Engineer to Training Manager.....	101
5.2	Mr. Allan: From Successful Business Leader to Professional Business Leader .....	107
5.3	Edward: From Local Manager to General Manager in China .....	112
5.4	Jan: From IT Naive to IT Manager .....	115
5.5	Doris: From high school principal to NGO consultant .....	119
5.6	Mary: From Senior Manager to Unit Head .....	123
5.7	Summary .....	126
Chapter 6.	Findings and Discussion (Cross Case Analysis).....	128
6.1	Values of EMBA.....	128
6.2	Challenges to Learning.....	142
6.3	Facilitation to Learning .....	146
6.4	Personal Drivers of Learners.....	151
6.5	Summary .....	160
Chapter 7.	Conclusion & Recommendations.....	162
7.1	Contribution to the Answers of the Research Questions .....	162
7.2	Contribution to Knowledge.....	172
7.3	Contribution to Designing other Graduate Programs .....	181
7.4	Recommendations .....	182
7.5	Limitations of the Research .....	185
7.6	Conclusion.....	186
7.7	Further Research.....	189
References	.....	190
Appendix 1: Interview Questions.....		210
Appendix 2: Sample of Transcript of Interview .....		212
Appendix 3: Original Themes & Code .....		220
Appendix 4: Research Ethical Form .....		229
Appendix 5: Consent Form.....		234



## List of Tables

Table 1 History of the Development of Universities funded by UGC in HK.....	5
Table 2 A comparison between Knowles' Assumptions and EMBA Participants' Characteristics ....	28
Table 3 Non-transformative Outcome .....	46
Table 4 Transformative Outcomes.....	48
Table 5 Background of Interviewees (Alumni) to be interviewed.....	59
Table 6 The Organizing Themes and the Basic Themes.....	65
Table 7 Profile of the Interviewees .....	72
Table 8 The Values and Meaning of the EMBA .....	128
Table 9 Summary of Outcomes through the EMBA Program of each interviewee.....	141
Table 10. Challenges (Blockages) to Learning .....	142
Table 11 Facilitation to Learning.....	146
Table 12 The Personal issues/Drivers of Learners.....	151
Table 13 The Motivation and Expectations of Interviewees .....	154
Table 14 Triggering Events (Conditions) for Transformation and Major Outcomes .....	159
Table 15 The values and meaning identified that have not been emphasized before .....	160
Table 16 Conditions for Achieving the Identified Values (EMBA as a Source of Transformation) .....	170
Table 17 Conditions for Achieving the Identified Values (EMBA as a Source to Prepare Learner's Future).....	171
Table 18 A Comparison of the Motivation and Expectation .....	173
Table 19 The Impact of Personal Transformation to the Others .....	175
Table 20 The Learning Environment (Atmosphere) Facilitating Transformative Learning .....	178

## List of Figures

Figure 1 The Theoretical Framework of the Research.....	46
Figure 2 The Thematic Network Models .....	67

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Executive MBA and its Development

An Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) program is a type of Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree program tailored to fit the needs of senior executives who work full time and want to keep abreast of the latest business knowledge and skills.

The curriculum of EMBA program usually follows the design of MBA programs. However, EMBA programs are delivered based on the needs of senior executives. It is usually delivered in the evening or during the weekends so that senior executives can join the class without interfering their work. Moreover, the EMBA program focus is to investigate and analyze business at a more strategic level (EMBA Council, 2015).

EMBA Council (2015) defined EMBA as follows:

“...a way for experienced business leaders to earn a master’s degree in business administration while working in a format that minimizes disruption to their work.”

Since the establishment of the first EMBA program by the University of the Chicago in 1943, more and more EMBA programs have been established. It is expected that the demand for EMBA will continue to get higher as developing countries are lacking in management experts (Ethier, 2017). With the recent development of the “One Belt, One Road” project which aims to connect China and other countries globally, it is expected that EMBA will be even more in demand in China (Authors, 2014). In fact, many top ranked Universities have set up their operations in Asia. In 2013, the University of Chicago had set up its operations in Hong Kong targeting to recruit the senior executives from China and Asia. The tuition fees have even increased up to US\$150,000.

Although the curriculum of the master of business administration (MBA) may vary in different universities, they try to adhere to one of the original objectives of MBA, that is, to develop

better managers and leaders such that they can achieve the goals of organizations more effectively (Schlegelmilch & Thomas, 2011). Since the establishment of MBA programs in the 1950s, they have undergone at least three major development stages (Latham, Latham, & Whyte, 2004). During the 1960s, MBA aimed to be a professional program and professionalism was considered as what an MBA should drive at. To create a professional image, the curriculum had been designed using a scientific management approach. During this period, the curriculum was designed to focus on developing the analytical skills and data analysis skills of managers. Since then, the demand for MBA programs had increased rapidly until the 1990s when global competition was getting fierce and more and more new MBA programs were established all over the world. To stay competitive in the new business environment, specialized MBA programs were developed to capture the niche market. For instance, the Kellogg School of Business at Northwestern University emphasizes marketing (Carpenter, n.d.) and the University of Chicago is particularly famous for economics (Wile, 2013). Moreover, Ivey School of business, one of the top Canadian business schools focuses extensively on leadership (Ivey Business School, n.d.a) and highlights its case study learning approach (Ivey Business School, n.d.b).

In the last ten years, EMBA programs have been developed to increase their global markets especially in China, Asia, and the Middle East as the competition in the executive education is getting fiercer. Nevertheless, it can be foreseen that competition among the EMBA programs will become more and more challenging as more competitors join in the market.

## 1.2 EMBA in the Context of Hong Kong

### 1.2.1 A Brief Development of University Education in Hong Kong

The development of University Education in Hong Kong followed closely to the British education system until 1997. Originally, the higher education system was an elitist system, and only very few people with high social class could afford to be enrolled. The first University, established in 1911, was the University of Hong Kong. In 1964, due to the high demand for higher education and the request from the society, Chinese University was established.

However, still, only about 2% of high school student graduates could be enrolled. Until the late 1980s, the number of degree holders was tightly controlled through the University Grants Committee, which plays a critical role in allocating funding to different Universities (University Grants Committee, 1996).

Due to the open door policy of China, many manufacturing plants have moved into China to take advantage of the low labor costs. Labor-intensive industries such as garment and electronics have rapidly moved out of Hong Kong to China. Hence, the economy of Hong Kong has been gradually transformed into a service economy, and more skilled or educated work force were required in Hong Kong.

To cope with the economy transformation, the Hong Kong government has planned to expand the quota of higher education from 2% up to 18%. Therefore, during the period 1984-1994, the system of higher education has also been transformed and expanded accordingly. The elitist higher education system had been transformed to become a system that aims to open higher education to a much larger proportion of the public (Morris, McClelland, & Yeung, 1994; Mok, 1999).

However, two major challenges had to be resolved. The most important one being the source of funding and the other challenge was how to increase the number of first-degree holders in a short period. To recruit more first year undergraduate students, a new University that focused on technology and science development was established in 1991. Additionally, two existing polytechnics were upgraded to Hong Kong Polytechnic University and City University of Hong Kong, and the Baptist College was upgraded into Baptist University. As a result, 18% of high school students were eligible to study in Universities in 1994. Lingnan College, the first Liberal Arts College in Hong Kong was also awarded the status of being a University in 1999. In 2016, the Hong Kong Institute of Education was granted the university title- the Education University of Hong Kong.

In the year 2000, Mr. Tung Chee Wah became the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong Administrative Region after Hong Kong was returned to China by Britain. Mr. Tung affirmed

that Hong Kong would be heading to a knowledge-based economy and more resources would be given to higher education (Tung, 1999). In fact, Mr. Tung believed that all Hong Kong people should be lifelong learners (Tung, 1999). The government had even committed that 60% of the secondary school graduates should be able to get into local Universities (Tung, 2005). Currently, there are eight Universities that are funded by the government (HKSAR Education Bureau, 2017). In addition, there are other self-financed academic institutes that offer higher education (University Grants Committee, 1996). Table 1 shows the eight Universities that have been established.

To assure the teaching and learning quality, Hong Kong followed the practice of the British administration, whereby a University Grants Committee (UGC) was formed in 1965 (University Grants Committee, 2017). The role of the UGC is supposed to provide consultation on the funding and development of higher education in Hong Kong. Moreover, it controls the quota of admission of each university and determines if new programs should be opened to meet the needs of the Hong Kong community. Members of UGC include local and international academics, community leaders and professionals from different areas and are directly appointed by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong.

In summary, more and more knowledge workers are in demand in Hong Kong due to the transformation of the economy. The government has also committed to using different expansion strategies to meet the demand. However, senior executives or business leaders who are above 40 years old may not be well equipped to face the new business environment.

Table 1 History of the Development of Universities funded by UGC in HK

Year	Establishment
1911	Hong Kong University
1963	Chinese University
1965	Establishment of University Grants Committee (UGC)
1989	Government announced increasing the University enrollment to 18%
1991	Hong Kong University of Science & Technology
1994	Hong Kong Polytechnic University City University of Hong Kong Baptist University
1999	Lingnan University
2016	The Education University of Hong Kong

In 1999, Lingnan College, the only liberal arts college was converted into Lingnan University. More recently, the Hong Kong Institute of Education was granted University status and was renamed as the Education University of Hong Kong. So, starting from 2016, Hong Kong has established eight Universities that are funded by the government. However, the demand for higher education is still increasing, and the Hong Kong Society is looking for reform to meet the demand. Nevertheless, the Hong Kong government was reluctant to increase the budget for higher education. (Lee, 2014). Therefore all the Hong Kong Universities have to find ways to satisfy the education demand while maintaining the cost at a minimum.

## 1.2.2 Development of EMBA Programs in Hong Kong

### 1.2.2.1 *The Motivation*

Since 1990, many reforms have taken place in higher education in Hong Kong and many other Asian countries due to the latest development of technology, globalization, and international competition. Mok (2003, 2005, 2006), pointed out that the governments expect the Universities should run like corporations, and their income should not be reliant solely on the funding from the government. Instead, Universities should open programs in response to the needs of the market and generate income from these programs. The Hong Kong government has also encouraged local Universities to look for funding from different resources such as donations from corporations and alumni and tuition from self-financed programs (University Grants Committee, 2006; Lee & Gopinathan, 2003). To meet the challenges, many Universities have been developing different programs to gain surplus income for expanding the Universities. As more and more jobs require new and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills, many graduate programs are developed to fulfill these needs. More importantly, these programs are major financial resources for the Universities (Lorenz, Wittke, Muschal, & Steincrt, 2015).

The new type of MBA program, Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA), a wholly self-financed program was established to capture the needs of the senior executives and entrepreneurs who have no opportunities to pursue their higher education due to a variety of reasons. For instance, some may not have seen the need previously, and some of them are just too busy to develop their career. Additionally, the learning format of undergraduate programs is not designed for adult learning (Thompson & Gui, 2000).

The EMBA was developed in response to the reduction in funding from the government, which pushes Universities to look for alternative financial resources to support themselves (Warner, 2010). When the program was developed, the tuition of the EMBA program was among the highest in all the self-financed programs in many Universities. For instance, the tuition fee is HKD\$14,400 per credit which is the highest tuition fee among all the self-financial programs



in City University of Hong Kong (City University of Hong Kong n.d.). It was expected that the cash generated would be millions (HKD) annually. Also, it was a response to the need of the market as senior executives are looking for a reliable source to upgrade their skills and knowledge continually. It was also expected to build the brand image of the University as the target group of the program was influential businessmen and senior executives. In the long run, it was envisioned that the program could be exported to China and other countries. Or, it would be a partnership with prestigious international Universities to open the China market. Hence, the EMBA program is developed in response to the global effect, the local and international market needs, University Grants Committee (UGC)'s recommendation and the University's strategy to generate financial resources (Cheng et al., 2016).

Therefore, the development of EMBA programs was mainly market driven. In 1993, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) started her executive MBA aiming mainly at knowledge and skills transfer. CUHK has claimed that her vision and mission are (The World University Rankings, n.d.) to combine the best of China and West. In other words, the unique values of this program are that they help top-notch executives to apply Western knowledge in the context of Chinese culture.

#### *1.2.2.2 The development history*

To differentiate from CUHK, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology joined with the Kellogg School of Business of Northwestern University to offer a dual degree EMBA programs in 1996. It is claimed that the value of this program is not just knowledge and skills transfer, but also that it encourages participants to think differently by viewing their operations in a new way. The value of the program is to train Asia leaders to cope with future global challenges and keep their corporations internationally competitive (Kellogg-HKUST EMBA Program, 2014).

In 1997, the City University of Hong Kong saw the blooming opportunities to do business in China. As the economy of Hong Kong was getting more and more service oriented, a new EMBA program focusing on Service Management and China Business was established by City

University of Hong Kong. The value proposition of the program focused on knowledge and skills transfer with specialization in service management and China business. In 2003, a new director was appointed, and the focus has been gradually shifted to leadership development and transformative learning (City University of Hong Kong, n.d.).

At the same time, Ivey School of Business of University of Western Ontario from Canada has used a different approach to recruiting students. It is claimed that (Experience the Ivey EMBA Difference. (n.d.)):

“Our graduates describe the program as nothing short of transformational - a life-changing experience...Through interactive education alongside other experienced professionals, you'll build exceptional leadership skills.”

In other words, Ivey's EMBA program claims that it is a transformational experience that enables participants to become exceptional leaders. The positioning of it is quite different from the others as it does not emphasize the content to be delivered, but rather the impact on the students.

The demand for EMBA expanded rapidly in the 90's, especially in China (Ethier, 2017). However, one major challenge in capturing the China market is the language barrier. Most of the EMBA programs are conducted in English, and there is a lack of textbooks or case studies that address the management issues in China. Moreover, due to the anti-corruption policy, senior government officials are not allowed to attend EMBA programs. The rationale behind this is that senior government officials have been sponsored by corporations to study EMBA programs, which include all overseas study trip expenses. In other words, the EMBA program has been made a legal channel by corporations to entertain the senior government officials in China. In 2015, the China government set up a new policy. All EMBA students must go through a public examination to assess their academic qualification (Hancock, 2017). As a result, many non-degree holders or potential candidates without tertiary education who cannot achieve the required standard set by the government are rejected. More importantly, senior government officials are requested to demonstrate their financial resources for paying the tuition of the EMBA program. Since then, the demand has been dropped significantly, and the competition among EMBA programs has become more keen and fierce due to a lack of qualified students.

Transfer of the latest business knowledge and skills from both Eastern and Western worlds are commonly used as the main objectives of the program. It is not easy to assess if this knowledge and skills can be applied or if the return of investment can be justified. Other perspectives to look at the values of the EMBA programs are the transformative experiences that the EMBA programs provide, although these are not easy to quantify.

#### *1.2.2.3 The Positioning of EMBA Programs in Hong Kong*

Due to keen competition, EMBA programs must show their values and contributions to the participants to attract qualified candidates, especially if they are not supported by their corporations or sponsored by scholarship and other benefactors. Therefore, the EMBA programs have to rethink what are the values of EMBA programs.

Currently, the positioning of the EMBA programs in Hong Kong is distinct. However, their features can be classified into two major categories. The first types of features are related to knowledge and skill transfer and the second type is transformative learning related. For instance, Kellogg, Ivey and City University of Hong Kong mention transformation, but from different perspectives. Kellogg focused on transforming participants regarding their thinking (Carpenter, n.d.). Ivey aims to provide participants with career transformation (Experience the Ivey EMBA Difference. (n.d.)). The City University of Hong Kong called its learning approach as ELITE (Experiential Learning in Transformative Environment) whereby also transformation will occur in its EMBA program (City University of Hong Kong n.d.).

In other words, Universities may focus on instrumental learning, which aims to provide managers or business leaders skills and knowledge to solve the problems that they encounter in their own business environment. The others position themselves as providing transformative learning experiences, which may challenge learners' assumptions, values, and habit of thinking.

### **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

In the previous section, the current situation of EMBA has been discussed. While EMBA programs are supposed to serve the executives, it is not clear to what extent the claimed outcomes of different Universities have been achieved. In fact, the general learning experience of the executives have not been thoroughly detailed and discussed in the major EMBA programs operating in Hong Kong.

Since the launch of EMBA programs, they have always been a talking point in the society for various reasons. But the most dominant reasons are their high tuition and their students who have high social status and influential power. Many of them are actually famous business leaders, and celebrities and some are even senior government officials (Chen, Doherty, & Vinnicombe, 2012; Bruce, 2009; EMBA Council, 2017).

However, the education of EMBA programs is controversial as many professors have complained that the EMBA programs are not capable of delivering quality education. They cannot train the students to perform better in their working environment. Moreover, some Professors of the EMBA programs are researchers without practicing what they have been teaching before (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; O'Toole, 2009). The young professors are hired because of their strong research record rather than their business experiences. Hence, business students may not be getting the right kind of business knowledge and skills (Long, 2004).

Moreover, the scientific management and specialization approach in running EMBA programs have long been criticized by many researchers as management is more than analytical skills; soft skills are found to be more important in the working environment (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002, 2004). Business problems are supposed to be viewed from a holistic point of view rather than looking at them as an individual function. Latham et al. (2004) argued that MBA programs should breakdown the functional silos because business in the real world is an integration of different business functions together. An integrated approach, which investigates problems from various functional perspectives has to be implemented to meet the new business challenges in the 21st Century. Li-Hua & Lu (2014) has a detail discussion on the challenges in the new direction of MBA programs as researchers and practitioners are have different opinions on the direction the MBA design.

Despite the controversy over EMBA programs, more and more people are enrolled in the EMBA programs especially those prestigious Universities with strong brand names. Many researchers argued that the values of EMBA programs are more than acquiring the skills and knowledge to do the “right” job “right.” One should look at the contribution of the EMBA programs from overall satisfaction or experiences. (Long, 2004; Bruce, 2009; Inderrieden, Holtom, & Bies 2006; Carpenter, 1997; Chen et al. 2012; Han & Liang, 2015; Ruth, 2017).

In summary, both positive and negative critics about EMBA programs can be identified in the last decades. However, it seems that the performance of EMBA programs is evaluated using different dimensions and measurements by different researchers. Additionally, the purpose of each EMBA is claimed to be different from the others. Thus, the impact and contribution of EMBA should be re-evaluated from a more holistic approach. Further details are discussed in Chapter 2.

#### 1.4 Personal Experiences as an EMBA Director

To understand the impact of EMBA program to the business leaders in Hong Kong better, I will share my own experience with EMBA learners in this section. As an EMBA associate director for five years and an EMBA director for more than 15 years at the City University of Hong Kong, I have been receiving feedback continually from more than 300 EMBA graduates through both formal and informal channels. I have been systematically receiving feedback from structured focus group meetings, teaching evaluations and exit surveys. More importantly, I have been listening to their stories through different informal channels such as course end dinners, ad hoc happy hour gatherings and many other social activities. While the findings of the research work have disclosed some tangible and intangible values of the MBA and EMBA programs, there is lack of insight regarding why and how people have been transformed. In fact, I have learned a lot more about the stories of EMBA students during informal occasions such as the class breaks and social gatherings.

I am amazed by what they have experienced, recalled and treasured in their 2 years’ EMBA

journey. They have shared with me how the EMBA program has changed their pattern and habit of thinking, inspired them to view issues from an entirely different angle and most importantly their lives. They have shared with me their emotions and the incidents that have really impacted on their lives.

For instance, an entrepreneur of a small company shared with me how he has changed his hatred towards the multi-national corporations (MNC). Instead of considering them as competitors, he has learned how to co-operate or partner with them after interacting with the senior executives from MNC in a learning environment. A critical incident that he encountered was that he was praised by a teammate who was the group director of human resources of a multi-national corporation (MNC). In addition, he was impressed by his teammate's structured approach in conducting meetings. The two years' journey of EMBA has changed his attitude towards MNC.

An owner of a traditional manufacturing plant shared with me that his action of enrolment in the EMBA had inspired his subordinates to change their learning attitude. His subordinates are now more willing to learn new things and are more adaptive to changes in response to the needs of the market. A senior executive told me that his family became more harmonious since he has started studying EMBA. His learning attitude has influenced all his children. Instead of forcing and monitoring his children to study, he has become a role model for studying for his children. For his wife, she spends time supporting his study rather than arguing with him on what he considers as minor issues. So, the impact of EMBA has extended to his colleagues as well as to his family. Hilgert (1995, 1996) had also recognized the impact of EMBA on the lives of students.

A senior executive of a Japanese corporation shared with me how joyful he was on the day that he had received his admission letter. The reason behind this was that he had graduated from a university in China. He felt that his capability was not well recognized. An EMBA degree from a local well-recognized university of international standing in Hong Kong would give him a new identity that would enable him to gain full respect from his colleagues. As pointed out by Warhurst (2011), a contribution of an EMBA program is forming a new management identity for the students. The award of an EMBA degree provides a professional image, and the

recipient is perceived as a professional manager.

One may argue that EMBA students are more interested in building social networks through the program. It may be true to a certain extent, as they like to meet with people from diverse backgrounds. However, as stated by Ballou et al. (1999), they want to meet with people for new stimulation and education rather than viewing the EMBA network as a social network. EMBA students are all prominent business leaders who have channels to build relationships. So, if building connections is a major goal for attending EMBA programs, then, the question is how the EMBA networks are different from the other social networks such as prestigious clubs or charity societies. A Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a security firm told me honestly that he was not here for social connections as he felt tired of dealing with people in his working environment.

One may argue that an EMBA program is a dream fulfilling program as some of the business leaders have never had a formal college training before they enter the program. To fulfill their college dreams, they are enrolled to experience what college life is. Still, these non-traditional students are a minority in most of the EMBA programs, and therefore, this cannot fully explain the motivation of the students. Perhaps, one may argue that students are enrolled to get a formal qualification, namely, a degree granted by universities. However, the argument may not be applied as some students may even already have double or triple masters or even a Ph.D. degree.

The meaning and values of the EMBA education must be more than building a social network, career advancement, and skills and knowledge acquisition. EMBA can have a profound impact on the lives of participants (Hilgert, 1996; Ballou, 1999; Fisher, 2004; Warhust, 2011).

In fact, many top ranking EMBA programs have claimed that their programs are transformative journeys. For example, the EMBA of Wharton School claimed that it can provide transformative skills for women executive for career growth (The Wharton School, n.d.). However, they have seldom discussed how they design and deliver the program to transform their students. Even though they may have touched on how the curriculum can help students to broaden their horizon, but they have not mentioned the conditions to facilitate students'

transformation.

There is no doubt that EMBA students may come with different motivations and cannot be explained with one or two reasons. Thompson and Gui (2000) have identified 13 major motivations that drive Hong Kong executives to pursue an MBA. Although research work Schlegelmilch & Thomas, 2011; Kang & Sharma, 2012) has been conducted to understand the values and outcomes of EMBA programs, the past work did not answer how those outcomes have been achieved from the views of the students. Also, those research studies were done in Western cultures; it is not certain if the outcomes will be the same when applying these results in Hong Kong, a place highly influenced by Chinese culture.

Although different researchers have attempted to identify the motivation of the EMBA learners, they do not provide a fully satisfactory or comprehensive explanation why learners are keen to study EMBA (Chen et al., 2012; Bruce, 2009). As stated by Dakduk, Malavé, Torres, Montesinos, & Michelena (2016), the relationship between personal traits such as motivation has not been studied in depth and the role of motivation in the EMBA journey is not fully understood.

As one can see, the experience of each EMBA participant I mentioned is quite different. I can see that the meaning and values of the EMBA program to them are quite different too. The transformative learning experiences of EMBA programs have perhaps not been paid sufficient attention. The transformative learning process of the EMBA program and its outcomes has not been fully explored.

## 1.5 Aims and Objectives

Therefore, the aims of the proposed research are multi-fold and can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Evaluate the contribution of EMBA programs to the business executives and leaders in Hong Kong from different aspects.
- 2) Identify the learning conditions or triggering events that can facilitate business leaders



to be transformed.

- 3) Explore how an EMBA program should be designed to maximize the transformation potential of participants.

## 1.6 Research Questions

The research questions to be studied are as follows:

- 1) What are the factors motivating people to study an EMBA program and what are the expectations of learners?
- 2) What are the transformative outcomes and to what extent are learners transformed through participation in the EMBA program?
- 3) What are the critical incidents, learning process and environment that shape the transformation of EMBA participants?

## 1.7 Significance of the study

First, this research provides a holistic view of the values and contributions of EMBA programs from the learners' point of the views instead of evaluating the programs from Professors or management's point of view. In particular, the motivation and expectation of the individual learners will be identified.

Secondly, through the experiences of the interviewees, more insights on how adult learning can be transformed will be gained. The incidents that trigger transformation will be collected. The effectiveness of both formal and informal learning process designed for transformative learning can be evaluated to supplement previous quantitative research.

Thirdly, it is expected the EMBA curriculum planning, design and delivery can be further improved to create more values for the business leaders. The recommendations of the applications of the research are discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

## 1.8 Summary

Once the research questions proposed have been studied, it is expected that the results generated can help further enhancing the transformative experiences of the EMBA learners. With the results, it can use to market EMBA program, design the curriculum and most importantly, reposition the values of EMBA if necessary to face the keen competition in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Academically, it should provide insights in how to design a favourable transformative learning environments.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

In this section, I will first discuss both the positive and negative points of views about the EMBA education from different researchers. Following the critiques, I will discuss the development of EMBA and MBA programs in China as one of the aims of the research is to understand the contribution of EMBA programs in Hong Kong which is strongly influenced by Chinese culture. Finally, I will discuss about adult learning, and transformative learning as senior executives or business leaders are adults who determine voluntarily to join the program. The research of transformative learning will finally be reviewed as I aim to understand if transformative learning have taken place in EMBA programs.

### 2.1 Critiques of MBA and EMBA program

While it is expected more and more people are enrolled in MBA programs (EMBA Council, 2017), the contributions of MBA have been questioned. In particular, it has been controversial whether MBA has fulfilled its original mission (Chen & Doherty, 2013). In other words, it is doubtful if MBA can help to develop a manager to perform better in the work environment.

In fact, complaints against the contribution of MBA programs have been received from both the corporate and academic worlds. Pfeffer and Fong (2002, 2004) claimed what people learned from MBA programs are irrelevant to their working environment and cannot enhance their career development at all. Mintzberg (2004) complained that full-time MBA programs are not teaching the “right” skills and knowledge to equip better managers. MBA students are criticized that they lack the motivation to learn business knowledge and skills, but are rather looking for networking opportunities (Armstrong, 1995; Crainer & Dearlover, 1999). Professors focus very much on research work, which has no impact and has no understanding of the needs of the real world (Mintzberg, 2004). Rubin and Dierdoff (2009) reported that the most critical skills and knowledge that managers should learn are placed at the lowest priority in teaching. Hindo and Baker (2004) wrote a paper entitled "Don't hire him-he's a Harvard MBA" to criticize the practicality of MBA education. From a financial viewpoint, MBA students do not necessarily gain advantage in terms of their career advancement (Fisher, 2004;

Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). More and more newly recruited Professors have never practiced what they teach (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005) as Universities emphasis much more on research rather than teaching. Welch and Dehler (2007) also agreed that MBA education, which has been a status quote for a long time should provide more relevant teaching approaches. Zhao, Truell, Alexander, & Hill (2006) have even done a complaint summary about MBA programs on journals and magazines. Some researchers even claimed that the effect of building good managers and leaders through MBA or EMBA programs (Gold, Holt, & Thorpe, 2007; Gold, Thorpe, & Mumford, 2010; Grey, 2009; O'Toole, 2009). In short, many have argued that the original goal or mission of MBA has not been fulfilled with the current MBA programs.

However, according to Long (2004), students attending executive education such as EMBA do not have the intention to fulfill any organization goals, but rather their personal goals. They are in the program because of others such as their bosses or CEOs. To some degree, EMBA programs provide them with a platform to relate to other people or more importantly, an opportunity to be able to build relationships with senior executives. Bruce (2009) argued that the negative critics of MBA arise because researchers focus on skill and knowledge or content development. However, they have ignored the overall satisfaction and experiences of MBA. In fact, positive feedback of MBA programs is also identified by some researchers if one looks outside the content of the MBA programs. Inderrieden, Holtom, & Bies (2006) claimed that MBA could lead to early success in a career while Zhao, Truell, Alexander & Hill (2006) reported that MBA could even affect career success in the long term. These results contradict what Mintzberg (2004) and Pfeffer and Fong (2002, 2004) have claimed. According to the result of Carpenter (1997), an MBA is not a necessity, but many students argue that the degree helped to get their current job.

While complaints of MBA are mainly related to formal learning which focuses on knowledge and skills transfer on a functional basis, the value of informal learning has long been recognized. Hay and Hodgkinson (2008) reported that MBA programs could boost confidence level, self-esteem, and personal credibility even though the mentioned benefits may come from informal learning. Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Winstanley, & Littlejohns (2006) conclude that the most important impact of MBA programs on their students are the changes of their identities. However, both

authors claimed that their results are limited regarding conceptual development and need more empirical research to verify their claims further. Chia and Holt (2008) argued that MBA is an identity, which shows the managerial capability of a manager. Additionally, it will create a trustworthy and professional image. In summary, the value of MBA and EMBA should be evaluated using different dimensions rather than just from the corporations' point of view, which mainly focuses on skills and knowledge transfer.

In another survey (Thompson & Gui, 2000) conducted in Hong Kong, the results show that Hong Kong students' motivation for pursuing an MBA is quite practical. Hong Kong MBA students believe that it is important to get a formal degree and perform better in organizations through learning more management skills. Motivations related to personal and social development are less emphasised. Learning more business and management skills are critical especially in the Chinese community. While it has been critiqued that many business Professors lack professional working experiences to teach relevant business knowledge and soft skills (Mintzberg, 2004), the measures used by Mintzberg and other Professors to criticize MBA are not necessarily what MBA students consider as important. Or, the expectations of MBA students in Asia may be quite different from those in the Western countries. Thompson and Gui (2000) have not given an explanation about why Hong Kong students' expectations are different, and they have not assessed the overall satisfaction and experiences of students with the MBA programs they have attended.

Concerning curriculum, EMBA and MBA appear to be quite similar. But regarding the outcomes, the delivery, and the objectives, they are quite different. In particular, the profiles of participants are significantly different regarding income, age, and working experiences. So, it is quite questionable if the complaints from MBA can be applied in EMBA programs.

Hilgert (1995, 1996) examined the impact of EMBA from a personal development dimension. It is identified that EMBA contributes more than just business knowledge or skills because the program can impact on students' personal lives and relationships with others. However, Hilgert's research results are generated from just one EMBA program, and further studies on other EMBA programs should be conducted to ensure that similar developmental impact can

be identified in other EMBA programs. More importantly, there is not too much explanation on how and why EMBA has the developmental impact on the executives.

Interestingly, even MBA programs are criticized that they cannot build better managers and leaders, according to Johnson, Mc Laughlin, Saari, and Zimmerele (1998), the most commonly cited outcome of EMBA is to broaden the horizon of an individual. Or one may say that the priority issue of EMBA is different from MBA programs as students from EMBA programs are well recognized by successful businessmen and leaders in the community. Heisler and Benham (1992) pointed out that management development activities including in-house training, outside seminar and structured University programs such as MBA, should result in two types of outcomes, namely, personal growth and organizational effectiveness. So, personal development may outweigh the importance of organizational effectiveness in an EMBA program.

Ballou et al. (1999) conducted a study on the outcome of an executive development program and has reported that interactions with other participants is a highly rated value. It also claims that the key success factor is that students can freely exchange ideas with advanced professionals. Moreover, they can learn about a group of professionals from diversified professional fields. Or, at least it is a valuable learning network that provokes students to view issues from various perspectives. Again, what executives treasure is more than business knowledge and skills, they treasure gaining new ideas through interactions with other professionals.

Based on the research of Long (2004), the reason why people attend a university-based executive education program can be classified into four different categories including (i) personal reasons such as the belief in learning (ii) organizational reasons such as performing better in one's own working organization (iii) the influence of the others such as developing relationship with the boss and (iv) self-serving such as looking for a break. It is discovered that though people link executive education such as EMBA with the strategic goals of an organization (Conger & Xin, 2000), it is not the only reason. The results echoed Johnson et al. (1998) that EMBA learners may not consider becoming a better manager or leader as the most important goal.

In fact, Han and Liang (2015) used the visual and narrative data collected from 330 EMBA students to identify the outcomes that EMBA students valued mostly. They claimed:

“the four most valued outcomes... were an analytical framework, a well-connected network, a community to belong to, and a journey of self-discovery and renewal.” (p. 741)

Vohra et al. (2015) claimed that in the latest work environment, all leaders must be learning leaders. EMBA can play a critical role in developing leadership with the right mixed learning methods such as self-awareness and reflective activities instead of traditional lecture setting.

Longmore, Grant & Golnaraghi (2018) also asserted that in order to cope with the rapidly changing business environment, all organizations or corporations must also be learning oriented. So, business education itself must be transformed. It should develop new teaching and learning that can help participants to be transformed.

It is also noted that among the top 100 EMBA programs worldwide ranking by Financial Times, another common objective of EMBA programs claim is that they can transform or reorient the mindset of students. Instead of claiming that EMBA is a business training or education program solely, they argue that their EMBA programs are transformational learning experiences. That is, it can change the habit of thinking through the input from a group of students with the diversified background and expound their views of investigating issues from different angles. For example, HEC Paris, a top-ranked European business school worldwide, claimed that:

“our program offers the best of all worlds: its human class size of 200 participants and ideal 16-month program length allows participants to engage in a transformative learning experience that gives them the tools to achieve their personal and professional goals” (HEC, 2013)

Another example is Wharton School, a top rank US business school worldwide; it claims that:

“When you pursue the Wharton MBA for Executives, you learn to think differently about yourself, your career, and your life....The Wharton EMBA is much more than an MBA degree — it's a transformative experience.”(The Wharton School, 2018)

The University of Cambridge, a prestigious top University from England claims that:

“The Cambridge MBA is above all a transformative experience.”(Cambridge Judge Business School, n.d.)

### 2.1.1 Summary

Even though many top universities claim that they offer transformative experience, is it the top priority objective of students for achieving an EMBA program? Again, is there a gap between expectation of students and Universities?

After all, what have the EMBA students achieved after investing around two years' time and an enormous wealth to get an EMBA degree? So, what exactly are the values of EMBA programs to the students apart from business skills and knowledge?

## 2.2 The Recent Development of MBA and EMBA Programs in China

With the open policy of China, the demand for EMBA programs in China has been increased dramatically. While most of the research studies are related to the Western MBA programs, more studies are conducted in the context of Asian culture. Chen et al. (2012) mentioned that there is an increase in interest in understanding Asian Managers and management education. It will be more valuable to study the impact of executive education in the Eastern context (Chen & Doherty, 2013; Chen et al., 2012). The development of the EMBA programs in China is quite different from Western Societies due to three primary reasons: (1) it lacks of successful business cases as corporations in China has not been operated in the market driven environment before (2) students are used to lecture style and expect professors to feed them with solutions and insights and (3) while they claim that they want interaction in the class, some of them are too shy or too conservative to share their opinions as they do not want to lose face in the



classroom. As participants have come from a different business environment in China, their expectation from the EMBA programs is different. Consequently, how they measure the values and contribution of EMBA programs are quite different. (Chen & Doherty, 2013) reported the EMBA experiences in China from the perspectives of the local Chinese students. There are three things that they treasure most. The most important one is knowing-who as it will bring opportunities to connect with top executives and consequently providing the opportunities to bring their personal brand among the top management people. Of course, they also treasured the stories or insights shared by those top people. In particular, they can also acquire know-how or professional advice from the others. Another thing that they treasure is knowing-why which is related to the change in lifestyle and the work life balance. The last one is knowing-how which is linked to the sources of learning. Though similar values are also treasured by the Western students, Chinese students firmly emphasize on knowing-who. Or sometimes, it can be referred as Guanxi, the relationships with classmates, alumni, professors and the other stakeholders. Chen et al. (2012) has also studied the perceived value of EMBA programs to Taiwanese women. Similarly, knowing-who is the most important values to be acquired.

On the other hand, Western Universities are more focused on transformative experience. Babson College (Newswire, 2011) has stressed that the new curriculum was designed based on experiential learning that will develop a global mindset. It is expected that students can identify and capture opportunities to create social and economic value through the EMBA learning journey. Vazquez and Ruas (2012) identified that one of the most relevant aspects of student's learning experiences is to see world from different perspectives. However, learning new capabilities and developing new relationships are also important though they are relatively not that important.

Some researchers have challenged if the EMBA programs of those Western Universities can fulfill the needs of China. Li-Hua and Lu (2014) challenges the content, delivery and the pedagogy of EMBA programs, which was initially developed based on Western management. Therefore, many concepts, skills and knowledge may not fit the needs of Eastern managers.

According to Chen et al. (2012), it is identified that there are positive outcomes for women who have studied EMBA regarding their career advancement. EMBA programs have equipped

women with soft and hard management skills, built up their confidence and social networks. However, for women who are aged between 35 to 45 years old, social network or “knowing-who” is relatively more important than the other values or contribution of the EMBA programs. For women aged between 30 to 34 years old, they find “knowing-why” is more important. In other words, learning the management principles and skills are more valuable to this younger group of women.

Recently, due to the latest social, economic development in Asia, the role of women has been changed. Yukongdi and Benson (2005) have identified the opportunities as well as the barriers of the promotion of female managers in the business world. Among the business women in Asia, it is commonly believed “who you know” is more than important than “what you know” (Xie & Zhu, 2016). Though it is always perceived that there is a "glass ceiling" blocking the promotion of women in an organization, according to Xie and Zhu (2016)'s recent research results, the capability and achievements are more important than relationship building. In fact, women start to believe they can be promoted through their own abilities and accomplishments. As a result, women are more eager to gain business knowledge and skills through the EMBA programs.

The latest research (Ruth, 2017) indicated that the function of MBA cannot be analyzed based on cost-benefit analysis. The study showed that MBA played a critical role in the life of participants. It has further confirmed that the value of MBA goes beyond the instrumental value. Ruth (2017, p. 1) stated that:

“(The research)...advances our understanding of the MBA as an element in a life story, as a rite of passage, and as part of the intersection of boundaryless careers and changeable life patterns.”

For instance, it was identified that a lady used MBA as a way to get over her pain for the passing away of her sister and another student used MBA to build her social network as she is new in town. In other words, researchers should not just assess the values of MBAs or EMBA as an instrumental learning process, which will train managers to perform better in their own corporation's environment.

Recently, Zhang, Fu & Xi (2018) recommended that research should be conducted to develop management theory that can be integrated into management practice and these theories should be applied into both East and West management culture. He claimed that his research results should offer some thoughts in this direction for the others.

To fully understand the benefits of EMBA programs, one has to study them from different dimensions. One should also evaluate what and how the learners of EMBA programs have been transformed.

### 2.2.1 Summary

Though many researchers have complaints against MBA and EMBA programs, there is evidence that they are well received by the students. This is evident when the value and contribution of MBA and EMBA programs are evaluated from different perspectives. While an organization may expect MBA graduates can contribute better in their working environment, students are satisfied with the personal growth provided by the EMBA and MBA program. The skills and knowledge acquired in the MBA programs may not be directly applied in the work area, but the self-confidence, self-image and even the professional status may be boosted. In other words, in addition to MBA programs providing skills and acquiring knowledge, it is a platform for self-development leading to career advancement.

In a comparison study between MBA and non-MBA employees conducted by Kang and Sharma (2012), they claimed that the MBA degree holders are better than non-MBA employees in work performance in terms of their effectiveness, adaptability, and responsibility. On the other hand, they usually would demand for a higher monetary return and do not stay long with the same job. In other words, they are not quite loyal to their companies.

Recently, researchers have discussed more on how the expected outcomes of EMBA programs can be achieved. Allahar & Brathwaite (2017) has discussed how entrepreneurship courses, a common feature of EMBA program nowadays, can be effectively taught. According to Allahar

& Brathwaite (2017) top of teaching fundamental courses, the values of EMBA programs can be increased if the abilities of networking, fund raising and development of talents can be improved. They also claimed that transformative learning should well fit as a lens to study the learning experiences of EMBA students.

Therefore, many top Universities have changed their focus in promoting their EMBA and MBA programs. Instead of just highlighting the content and curriculum, they also spend a lot of effort in promoting their transformative learning outcomes. The transformative learning process is actually a component that is treasured by the EMBA and MBA graduates. Then, the question becomes whether MBA and EMBA programs are providing valuable transformative learning experiences to the participants.

### 2.3 Adult Learning and Transformative Experiences of EMBA

As mentioned before, EMBA programs are designed for senior executives or business leaders, so a class of an EMBA program is generally composed of adults learners with more than 18 to 20 years working experiences. They are usually high achievers in their own area and are even well recognized to the public. That is, they are not ordinary business students. They are expert students who may even have more experiences than their professors in certain areas. After all, they are adult learners and research work related to adult learning should be a good source to gain insights about how they learn and even transform. However, although many adult learning theories exist, there is a lack of research work that discuss adult learning in the context of EMBA program. While many papers have discussed MBA learning and their impact on their students, they have not provided in depth insights in how students can be transformed. Therefore, adult learning will first be discussed followed by transformative learning in the next sections.

### 2.3.1 Adult learning

Adults usually have rich experiences and have formed their own assumptions and values. They believe they have their own right to determine what and how to learn. However, youth usually need guidance from the teachers, and what and how they learn are predetermined by the teacher. Knowles (1990) used the term andragogy to describe adult learning and had developed the following six assumptions about it:

- 1) adults know what they need to learn
- 2) adults are responsible for their choices and decisions
- 3) adults have rich experiences
- 4) adults are ready to learn
- 5) adults are more life or task oriented
- 6) adults are motivated by internal pressures more than the external pressures.

The Knowles' assumptions can apply to the learning patterns of EMBA participants. EMBA participants are students with rich experiences in their own working areas. While some of them are searching for breakthrough opportunities without specify goals, they have a good understanding about what they want to achieve in the EMBA program. Some of them may be looking for breakthroughs in their own life while some are looking for acquiring skills and knowledge to advance in their work careers. For entrepreneurs, they look for opportunities and strategies to further expand their business. They may come from different industries and positions and hence have different perspectives and opinions in different issues. The EMBA participants may be professionals, senior executives or entrepreneurs. If I use Knowles' assumptions to classify the EMBA education, it fits well into the category of adult learning (Table 2).

Table 2 A comparison between Knowles' Assumptions and EMBA Participants' Characteristics

<b>Knowles' Assumptions (1990)</b>	<b>EMBA Participants' Characteristics (EMBA Council 2015)</b>
1. Adults understand what they have to learn	EMBA participants have goals and expectation to be met
2. Adults should be responsible for his own choices	EMBA participants have selected the program based on their own will.
3. Adults have rich experiences	The working experience of a EMBA participant ranging between 18 to 20 years and with at least six years of managerial experiences
4. Adults are ready to learn	EMBA participants have to make special effort to have spare time for learning. They have to have strong learning motivation.
5. Adults are more life or task oriented	EMBA participants usually expect to have career breakthrough, or they want to expand their life horizon
6. Adults are motivated by internal pressures more than the external pressures	EMBA participants are senior executive or leaderships who have achieved high social status and look for life breakthrough

Mezirow's transformative learning framework has been considered as a comprehensive model of adult learning process by some researchers (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton, 1994a; Cranton, 1994b; Taylor, 1997, 1998; Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b; Illeris, 2014; Longmore, Grant, & Golnaraghi, 2018). In fact, different researchers have used Mezirow's model to study adult learning in various context (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000). As the learning journey of EMBA is an adult learning process, Mezirow's model will fit in quite well in

understanding the process. In particular, it is expected that further insights in transformative experience of EMBA participants can be gained.

Mezirow classified learning into three domains based on Habermas' knowledge classification (Habermas, 1987, 2013). They are instrumental learning that focuses on manipulating or controlling the environment, communicative learning that focuses on learning about what others mean or understanding of the social norms, values and cultures and emancipatory learning that focus on relaxing assumptions and constraints. However, most of the learning involves all types, but the weighting on the domains may be different.

Cranton (1994a) classified adult learning into three orientations, namely (1) subject-oriented adult learning (2) consumer-oriented adult learning (3) emancipatory-oriented adult learning. Subject-oriented learning is the acquiring of facts and skills. This type of learning generally can be lecture based, and students are not required to participate too much in the class. However, it can be active if the design of the teaching involves solving a problem or work in a laboratory. Critical thinking is not emphasized in subject-oriented learning. Or, it is closely related to instrumental learning, which focuses on skills acquiring. With this approach, students may feel comfortable, and their expectation can easily be met.

For consumer-oriented adult learning, it is assumed that the learner has a good understanding what he or she needs. The learner is supposed to decide what to learn and if it fits his own objectives. However, subject-oriented or consumer-oriented learning is not easy to be separated or draw a line between them. The reason is that once the learner has decided what to pursue, the rest of the course design and teaching material will then be determined by the teachers. However, this approach assumes learners are highly motivated, know exactly what they want, set up their own objectives and will proactively search for the resources they need. Or, it is self-directed oriented. However, the approach does not require or encourage learners to rethink their assumptions. That is, transformation is not likely to happen. Brookfield has made some criticism in these aspects (Brookfield, 1987, 1991, 1995, 2000).

Emancipatory oriented learning aims to remove constraints through examination of

assumptions, values, and beliefs. The most challenging part of emancipatory learning is that education cannot actually force someone to re-examine the assumptions unless a student is ready to do so. Learners can gain their freedom and new power through emancipatory learning. Habermas (1987, p. 224-225) stated that:

“The goal of adult education is to help adult learners become more critically reflective, participate more fully and freely in rational discourse and action...”

Mezirow (1991) also believed that outcome of emancipatory learning could happen in both instrumental learning and communicative learning. Of course, emancipatory learning is not always the objective of adult learning as it is hard to challenge someone to examine his or her basic assumption or perspectives. Mezirow (1991) stated that learning is not necessarily transformative. The transformative process may even be painful to some adults. Brookfield (1995, 2000) claimed that adults are more comfortable to keep their habits, routines and the things that they are familiar with. Hence, not all people are naturally looking for transformative experiences and education.

As stated in Chapter 1, some EMBA programs claimed that they had provided instrumental learning which focuses on delivering business skills and knowledge. However, many prestigious Universities have claimed that their programs are transformative even though they have not defined transformative learning clearly. However, communicative learning is not emphasized.

Some of the challenges in the implementation of transformative learning are that learners may not feel comfortable in changing themselves or they may not even have this kind of expectation. As pointed out by Cranton, transformative learning can be painful or at least uncomfortable to some adults. On the other hand, subjective based adult learning, which is more fact acquiring can meet the expectation of the learners relatively easier. For instance, there are rules that one has to follow when learning accounting and not much critical thinking is necessary. One may argue that EMBA learners are senior executives or business leaders and they should know what they need. However, based on the survey of the motivations of pursuing an EMBA degree, motivation can be classified into what-to-know which is more related to instrumental learning,



who-to-know which is more related to communicative learning and why-to-know which is more close to emancipatory learning. However, some of them may just focus on just one dimension such as who-to-know. Many students participate in EMBA programs for the sake of building social networks (Chen & Doherty, 2013) and rather than going thru the transformative learning process.

To a certain extent, the complaint against EMBA for not training a better manager or leader is based on the assumption that EMBA is a type of instrumental learning. It is expected that managers or leaders should have the ability to manipulate or control their working environment so that their problems or tasks can be solved. Or, it is expected that the learner should pick up knowledge, skills, and tools to tackle the management or business issues effectively. However, other researchers who give credit to EMBA programs emphasis the identity and learning transformation experiences provided by the EMBA programs. Therefore, to understand the value and contribution of the EMBA programs more accurately, the instrumental, communicative and transformative learning provided by EMBA programs should be all assessed. In particular, the value of emancipatory learning, which has not been mentioned in the other papers will be examined in this research. In the following section, transformative learning will be reviewed. This will serve as a base for evaluating the transformative process of the EMBA program.

### 2.3.2 Transformative Learning

To understand the transformative learning process of EMBA learners, one has to understand the transformative learning theories pioneered by Jack Mezirow, also known as father of transformative learning. However, to have a full picture about transformative learning, the contribution of other prominent researchers should also be reviewed. Therefore, this chapter will review both the work of Jack Mezirow and the others.

Transformative learning has been attracting researchers from different areas to contribute in the last forty years (Kokkos et al., 2015). Mezirow (1990, p. 1) states that:

"To make 'meaning' means to make sense of an experience, we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision-making or action, then making 'meaning' becomes 'learning.'"

In other words, learning should result through the critical reflection of experiences encountered by the learners.

As EMBA programs are developed for adults with the intention to transform the business leaders including senior executives and business owners, it is envisioned that research work related to adult learning and transformative learning can provide insights in understanding the contribution of EMBA programs.

In the next sections, three major questions will be examined:

- 1) What is transformative learning?
- 2) How does it occur?
- 3) What are the outcomes?

### 2.3.3 What is transformative learning?

According to Mezirow (1997), transformative learning can be defined as the processes or events, which challenge a learner's assumptions, beliefs, and values that were formed through one's life encounters. Later, Mezirow (2000) has revised or expanded the definition of transformative learning from meaning perspectives into habits of mind and point of view. According to Mezirow (1991), habit of mind is formed at childhood through the process of socialization without going through the critical thinking process. When people express something based on their habit of thinking, it is considered as a point of view, opinions that are more open to change.

He formally states that transformative learning is (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7-8):

“...the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference... to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action...”

Mezirow has been well recognized for his contribution to transformative learning theories, some researchers echoed his ideas. However, many other researchers have different view on transformative learning and have pointed out the deficiencies of Mezirow's definition on transformative learning.

Cranton (2009) defined transformative learning as a process of challenging one's beliefs values, assumptions, and perspectives. To some degree, Cranton echoes what Mezirow promotes. Kitchenham (2008) believed that transformative learning could reframe a learner's world through critical reflection and examinations of assumptions. As a result, learners may interpret the meaning of their experiences quite differently. Or, one may say that their habit of mind and perspectives are changed after transformative learning.

The research work conducted by Boyd (1991) and Boyd & Myers (1998) and his colleagues have viewed transformation learning from a different angle. Unlike Mezirow, they focused on the deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions rather than the rational aspects. Boyd and Myers (1998, p. 261) claimed that:

"...education must adopt the ending-view of helping individuals work towards acknowledging and understanding the dynamics between their inner and outer worlds. For the learner, this means the expansion of consciousness and the working toward a meaningful integrated life as evidenced in authentic relationships with self and others. This view of education we have called transformative education."

Many researchers even question how exactly a learner has been transformed. Kegan (2000) asked the question what forms transformation. He believed that some transformation could change our beliefs and assumptions, but others may even affect our own self and being. Kegan (2000) considered that transformative learning should not just lead to perspective changes, but also improve the capability to take care of complexity. Parkes (2001) stated that some transformation might change our understanding of life and asked about the nature of human consciousness. Lange (2004) believed that transformative learning does not only form new thinking and perspectives, but it can play a role to restore old assumptions. In other words, the definition of transformative learning used by Mezirow is too narrow in the view of the other researchers. Illeris (2014) further criticized Mezirow and argued that transformative learning is not just about transformation of meaning, habits of mind and perspectives. It should also involve the transformation of identity. In other words, many researchers believe that the outcomes of transformative learning is much more than what Mezirow has claimed.

After the evolvement for more than 30 years, there is still no unified definition for transformative learning. Illeris (2014) claimed that one should consider identity transformation as the universal changes. However, this view has not been widely adapted yet. Tisdell (2012 p21) used music as a metaphor to describe the situation as follows:

"There are many themes and variations of transformational learning just as there are in music... The theme is announced, the variation provides depth, but the whole of the piece and its effects on the listener are always greater than the sum of its parts."

However, one common key point of transformative learning is that learners are expected not to take things for granted and they are supposed to re-examine their own beliefs, values, assumptions such that they can have a new understanding of their own self, the meaning of life and their relationship with the society. Or one may say, there are dimensions of perspectives change namely, psychological (self-understanding) changes, convictional (value and belief) changes and behavior (lifestyle) changes. Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) also includes the role and meaning of spirituality in adult transformative learning. In this research, I will identify the transformation of participants using different dimensions.

#### 2.3.3.1 *Summary*

While Mezirow (2000) plays a significant role in promoting and developing transformative learning, just as Tisdell (2012, p. 21-26) has stated:

“There are many themes and variations of transformational learning just as there are in music. ...the core melody serves as the theme, and then many variations are played on that theme as the piece moving along”.

Though Mezirow (1997) has started the transformative learning theory, it has been criticized as too rational; therefore, other researchers have supplemented him by investigating emotion, spiritual and other forms of knowing. O'Sullivan (1999) has even discussed the integration of cognition, spirituality and other dimensions such as creativity together. Some researchers have even queried why transformative learning has not even addressed two significant issues of human beings, namely, love and death. Recently, Hoggan (2016a, 2016b) expressed the concern that almost any changes or instances of learning can be considered as transformative. He believed instead of arguing what transformative learning is, one should consider there are different types of outcomes through transformative learning. However, the extent of transformative may be different. Though there are more and more articles from different disciplines discuss about transformation, one must be cautious not to classify all things as transformation.

This research will focus on personal transformation rather than the direct impact of transformative learning to the society. It will also discuss how the EMBA programs can transform the business leaders and in turn potentially affect their performance in their organizations.

### 2.3.4 How does it occur?

#### 2.3.4.1 Mezirow's point of view

While there is not a unified definition for transformative learning, there are also different views on how transformation can occur. According to Mezirow (1997), transformation may occur following ten steps. He initialized his research within a women's college in the context of the women's liberation movement in the States in the 1970's. He proposed that transformative learning should take place according to ten steps. Later, Mezirow agreed that there may be variation of the steps for transformation to be occurred. The ten steps can be summarized as follows: (Mezirow, 1978b, p. 12; Mezirow, 2000, p. 22):

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. Reintegration into one's life by conditions dictated by one's perspective

In other words, transformation begins with a “disorientation” dilemma. He claimed this was exactly what had happened to the women who studied in the community college in the 1970s. But Mezirow (1997) has also admitted that transformation can occur either through gradual accumulation of experiences or triggering events, which can be a life crisis. The ten steps can be summarized into four basic components, namely,

Mezirow (1997) believed that through the critical reflection of new experiences, people might either remain in the status quo or change their schemes and in turn change their perspectives. Mezirow stated that transformative learning can occur at the trigger of an event that has life impact. Mezirow claimed that when people are facing life's dilemma, they may transform. This is also referred as epochal transformation. It may also happen when a series of encounters with

different experiences are accumulated. It is believed that learners must go through critical reflection of the new experiences encounters, before new perspectives may be generated. Mezirow believed that there are three types of reflections including content, process and premises reflections. Nevertheless, the transformative process proposed by Mezirow is rational and analytical. Based on the ten transformative steps of Mezirow, transformative learning should go through three different phases, namely, critical reflection, discourse and look for alternative actions. In this thesis, I will compare these transformative phrases with the transformative experiences of the interviewees. The details will be discussed in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.

Mezirow (2000) later has summarized seven conditions that facilitate and support learners to be involved in the discourse process. These conditions point out that the learner must be ready and willing to accept alternate points of view. More importantly, learners should not be under any threat and given equal right to express their own views.

Though Mezirow did contribute to understand the conditions for transformation to occur, different researchers had also provided insights using different analysis. Cranton (1994b, 2006, 2009) asserts that transformative learning depends on the individual and can occur in addition to critical reflection. He believes that transformative learning can be facilitated through the authentic relationship between educators and learners. He also believes that different learners might fit in various learning styles. Hence, transformative learning may occur differently with different learners. He argues that people may change their perspectives through emotion rather than critical reflection. Cranton & Taylor (2012) believes that emotion can play an important role in transformative learning.

Other than being criticized as too rational, Mezirow's work is criticized as lacking the consideration of the context, and in particular, it is lack of emotional, intuitive and affective components in learning. Different researchers have added insights into how transformative learning occurs.

#### *2.3.4.2 Other Researchers' View*

Boyd (1991) claimed that transformative learning could be facilitated using group experience and engaging the imagination of learners. He emphasized the consciousness in adult learning as his work has developed a perspective of depth psychology. So, his focus was quite different from the other researchers.

Kegan (2000) criticized that Mezirow had not actually addressed the transformative learning process. He believed that transformative learning depends very much on the relationship between the educators and learners. Different learners will experience transformation differently due to their learning styles. It is also essential to develop good relationships between teachers and learners to facilitate transformative learning.

Daloz & Daloz (1999) stated that it is critical to create a good relationship between the educators and learners to facilitate the transformative learner. He believed that a teacher should consider how the learners will be influenced. A teacher must understand where a student is going and the role of a teacher when the student goes through the learning journey with the students. So, different from Mezirow, he believes that transformative learning is related to the others rather than just the learner only. Southern (2007) echoed Daloz and emphasized the creation of an open and trusting learning relationship to challenge and support students to be transformed. Southern (2007) believed that transformative learning occurs through the interaction with others. Hence, our relationship with others is critical in the transformative process.

Brookfield (2000) claimed that transformative learning occurs when learners are facilitated to rethink their assumptions critically. In other words, he believed that facilitation is necessary during the learners' rethinking process. Transformation occurs when learners are facilitated to reflect critically on assumptions that were formed under the pressure of political or social environment. In other words, facilitation is a "must" for transformative learning to occur.

Dirkx (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2012a, 2012b) discussed that the power of feeling in transformative learning. He believed transformation should occur through different dimensions of experiences.



The relationship between transformative learning and the work of soul are investigated. Dirkx & Mezirow (2006, p. 125) shared a similar view of Boyd and he states that:

“The perspective on adult learning from which I have been working for the past 20 years reflects a focus on the nature of the self, the various ways we have come to think about and understand our senses of self, our senses of identify, our subjectivity. I have come to refer to this view of transformative learning as soul work or inner work”

Tisdell and Tolliver (2001, 2003) and Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) also believed that transformative learning can be facilitated with the imagination of the learners. Therefore, different learning and teaching approaches such as arts, metaphors, other learning exercises and activities that can stimulate the imagination of learners are helpful for transformation. They have also addressed the challenges of fostering spirituality and how it can affect transformative learning. Tisdell (2012) also discussed how pop culture and entertainment can play a role in transformation.

Illeris (2004) does not believe that transformative learning can take place in a classroom setting. A learner will be transformed when he or she encounters a situation or problem that needs to be transcended. Illeris (2014) has described how learning can be resisted and defended. These hurdles are the everyday consciousness and defense of one's identity.

Dirkx (2001a, 2001b) claimed that he did not deny the role of rational reflection in transformative learning. However, he believed that there is also a part regarding the subjective world and the shadowy inner world.

Recently, Hoggan, Mälkki, & Finnegan (2017) argued that with the rapid changes of the environment, researchers should broaden their views on how transformation can be occurred. So, transformative learning does not necessarily to be started with an “orientation dilemma” as proposed by Mezirow.

Cranton and Taylor (2012) has shown that the context can also foster transformative learning. Transformation can occur through the triggering of events, emotions and external environment. Emotional triggers can be happy but not necessarily to be positive. In terms of the environment, it can occur in a group or private setting. Elliott & Reynolds (2002) believed that management education should be reformed. It should taking into the consideration of the emotion and power dynamics between the learner and education during the learning process.

To facilitate transformative learning, all stakeholders including learners, teachers, and administrators must be encouraged to be involved in transformative learning. Closs and Antonello (2011) believe the implementation of transformative learning should be done gradually as changing can be painful to some learners or even other stakeholders. They may have to face emotional barriers and anxiety when engaging in the transformative process.

Nicolaides and Dzubinski (2016) claimed that the favorable conditions for transformative learning to occur is the methods and practices of the collaborative developmental action inquiry (CDAI). They believe that CDAI is a promising approach that can facilitate transformative learning.

Longmore et al. (2018) argued that Mezirow's model is too much emphasized on the cognitive transformation. They believed that transformative learning can occur through the interactions of group of people in a particular types of setting. They suggest that learners should be put in a learning environment that engages other learners and facilitators in order for transformative learning to be occurred.

In other words, transformation may occur rationally, emotionally or spiritually. It also depends on the learning environment, the teaching approaches and the relationship between the educators and the learners.

### 2.3.5 What is the outcome of transformative learning?

Mezirow (2012) asserted that transformative learning should lead one to change his perspectives, habit of mind or the frames of reference. Illeris (2014) has criticized that transformative learning goes far beyond that. Many other researchers have also questioned the expected outcomes of transformative learning. Brookfield (2000) expressed that too many researchers have misused the term “transformation” to describe any instances that lead to reflection of assumptions. He claimed that transformative learning must change the fundamental assumptions of a learner. Newman (2012) challenged the outcomes of many cases of transformative learning, which are actually rooted in good practices of adult learning. He had also identified articles that considered changing point of views, seeing things from another angle and even gaining confidence as transformation. Illeris (2014, p150) claimed that it is:

“...lack of a clear and immediately understandable definition that can separate transformative from non-transformative learning, a precise term for what is transformed by transformative learning and what is outside the target area.”

He believed that the outcome of transformative learning is related to the change of self rather than just the perspectives of learner’s worldviews. Dirkx (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2012a, 2012b) emphasized that transformational learning involves learners' conscious and unconscious layers. Dirkx also emphasized the power of emotion and imagination on the transformation of the soul of learners.

Mezirow (1978a) initially focused on the transformation of a learner as rational and one should go through a critical reflection process to change his/her habit of mind, that is, perspectives and frame of references. However, he admitted that emotional, social (Mezirow, 2000) and spiritual dimensions should be included as part of the transformational process. Based on Mezirow, the core of transformative learning is that the learner can be free to examine their assumptions, and through a strategic mechanism such as critical reflection, a new perspective can be formed, and the learner can be released from their old assumptions or what they have learned from different resources or imposed by the authorities.

Closs and Antonello (2011) have reviewed how critical reflection can be integrated into management education. In particular, they have highlighted the contribution of transformative learning to management education. Hibbert & Cunliffe (2015) pointed out that transformative learning can help to develop collaborative, responsible and ethical management through the critical thinking of the assumptions and values advocating in an organization. It is believed that management education should help managers to think more critically and professionally (Cunliffe, 2002). Brooks (1992) stated that radical change of an organization requires critical examination of the values, assumptions and beliefs of an organization. Marsick and Watkins (2003) advocated that transformative learning can challenge the managers to rethink the taken-for-granted norms, practices and even structures. Van Woerkom believed that (2004) transformative learning through critical analysis can help to change the values of an organization.

Currie & Knights (2003) pointed out that due to the authoritative and assertive teaching style experienced by the learners, they will be wary of expressing themselves or even reluctant to participate in the class. To implement transformative learning effectively, teachers should look for opportunities to establish a close rather than intellectually superior relationship with students (Elliott & Reynolds, 2002). Another challenge of implementing transformative learning is that most of the students focus too much on career development rather than learning (Currie & Knights, 2003). Van Woerkom (2004) also noted that developing learners involved in transformation of organization may be considered as a "trouble maker."

Instead of focusing on the cognitive changes in transformative learning, it is proposed that the outcome of transformative learning is the transformation of identity as it is a broader term covering changes in different dimensions. Reynolds (1998, 1999) also pointed out that transformative learning through critical thinking may cause the change of one's self-identity.

Illeris (2014, p161) state that:

“...the term identity, which includes the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions and understood as the general link between the individual and its practical, cultural, and societal environment would be an appropriate and up-to-date opening...”

Therefore, "identity" transformation should be a better term to describe the expected outcome of transformative learning for a learner.

It is believed the identity of the learner should also be transformed. In the context of EMBA program, an EMBA student may consider that he is a management professional after he is graduated.

Recent research work has shown that there is a tension if transformation should be individual or socially dominant. Based on Mezirow (2012, p. 77) both the social and personal aspects of transformative learning are interrelated except that their focus are different. He concluded:

"Transformative learning has both personal and social dimensions and implications. It demands that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and as aware as we can be about the values that lead us to that perspectives."

From a business or EMBA's perspectives, I am more interested in the impact of transformative learning in the working environment. As mentioned before, some researchers underpinned the values of EMBA programs as they are not producing the "right" kinds of managers. However, in the rapidly changing business environment, the kind of executives or business leaders that are in need are not those that are well equipped with business knowledge and skills, they should be able to adapt to the business environment effectively in response the changing technology, the new types of working cultures and the global challenges. More importantly, they should be able to lead the organization to do the same. According to Marsick & Watkins (2003), those employees that are capable of challenging assumptions and adapt changes whenever needed are those that should be treasured by companies.

Engestrom (2004) stated that nowadays co-configuration which create product and service based on the changing needs of the users are essential. Heifetz (1994) said people can no longer stick with the old solutions; they have to create solutions for the new demands. Transformative learning can support people to adapt to the changing needs.

So, when researchers criticized that EMBA programs are not training good managers to fulfill the need of the working environment, it may have undervalued the transformative learning process which may change the mind set of business leaders or sometimes it can reorient the mindset of the learners. More importantly, these business leaders can create conditions for individual and organizational changes to cope with new business environment. They will not take things for granted but instead will change in response to the needs and even redefine the tasks if necessary.

For the purpose of this research, the personal transformative experience will be emphasized. With the structure of the EMBA program, it is expected that transformation will occur. However, this study will not be limited to the understanding of the change of habit of mind, meaning perspectives, and assumption examinations as emphasized by Mezirow. Different dimensions of transformative learning such as spiritual, emotional and cognitive aspects will also be discussed. Some research work has also shown that transformative learning can impact on the life of learners (Donaldson, 2009; Easton, Monkman, & Miles 2009; Macleod & Egan, 2009). Illeris (2014) emphasized that transformative learning should be defined as identity transformation. As different researchers have defined transformative learning differently, this research will not be limited to observing particular outcomes defined by Mezirow, but also look to other outcomes proposed by the other researchers. More importantly, I will look into how transformative learning can be facilitated or blocked.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Research

This research intends to study the values of the EMBA program. In particular, it is intended to identify the transformative outcomes of the program. Equally important, it attempts to understand the transformative process in terms of "why" and "how" participants are transformed through the EMBA learning journey. The transformative theories proposed by different researchers are used as the lens to study the transformative process of the EMBA program.

Based on the literature review (Chapter 2), there are two major factors that can influence the transformative learning. The first one is learning environment or the conditions for learning including the atmosphere for open discussion, free discourse and right to express (Mezirow, 2000; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Illeris, 2004; Cranton & Taylor, 2012). The second factor is the learning journey (experience) which includes the interactions with the professors and other participants, the events encountered by the participants and the pedagogy which stimulates students' thinking (Southern, 2007; Brookfield, 2000; Nicolaides & Dzubinski, 2016; Longmore et al. , 2018). However, the importance of the profile of the participants on gaining the values has not been studied. When Merzirow (1978a, 1978b, 1997, 2012) studied transformative learning, they only provide the personal transformative process without discussing how the profiles including the participant's past education experience, past work experience, learning expectation and motivation of a student can influence him or her to gain the values mentioned. The ten steps transformative process does not discuss the impact of the interactions with the others and how the profiles of the students are related to the transformative process. The outline of the theoretical framework of this research and the relationships of the mentioned components are depicted in Figure 1.

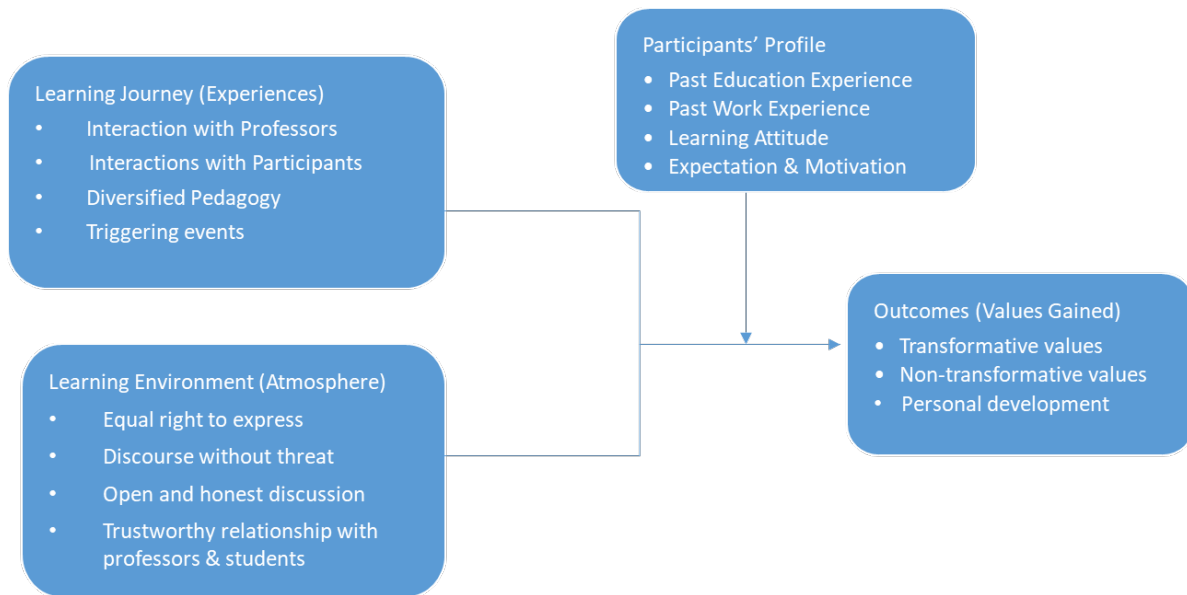


Figure 1 The Theoretical Framework of the Research

#### 2.4.1 The Outcomes

Even though many researchers such as Mintzberg has criticized the contribution of the EMBA program, there are others who have affirmed the values of EMBA. In the past literature (Chapter 2), it was identified that participants could acquire more knowledge through the instrumental learning process, strengthen their social network and even advance in their career. These values are more related to the expectation of the corporations. I classify these values as non-transformative values (Table 3). However, as mentioned in section 1.4, I have witnessed the transformation of the EMBA students. The learning journey of the EMBA program has provided a learning environment for participants to examine their own belief, assumptions, and values and consequently transform their own self. In fact, past research has shown that one of the values that students treasure is life renewal and self-discovery. I classify this as transformative values. However, the transformative value of the EMBA program has not been fully discussed. In this research, I will identify the values of the EMBA program that the students can gain. In particular, I believe that students can gain values that are non-transformative and transformative (Table 3Table 4).

Table 3 Non-transformative Outcome



<b>Related to the Career</b>	<b>Related to Personal Development</b>
1. Become Better Manager	1. Build a social network or gain a community to belong to
2. Apply learned practical skills and knowledge in a working environment	2. Build confidence level and self-esteem
3. Improve Organizational Effectiveness	3. Recognize as a business professional
4. Advance in career	4. Improve personal life & working relationships
5. Use a framework to solve work issues	5. Improve personal credibility

Table 4 Transformative Outcomes

<b>Transformative Outcomes</b>
1. Experience self-discovery and renewal
2. Transform mindset
3. Form new Identity
4. Change perspectives
5. Change belief and assumptions

#### 2.4.2 The Participants' Profile

In the past literature, though many researchers have attempted to identify the favorable conditions for transformative learning, they have not discussed how the profile of the students is related to the transformative process. For instance, the transformative experience for being a business owner may be quite different from the transformative experience for being a senior executive. While a senior executive may have a certain level of influential power in a company, he or she still is constrained by the company policy, rules, and regulations of the company he or she works for. A business owner can apply what he or she has learned without so many constraints as he or she is the final decision maker most of the time. So, business owners may have a higher chance to apply what they have learned and thus experience the values of the EMBA programs. Additionally, the past research has only identified the motivation of the students who study the MBA program, but it does not investigate how motivation or commitment will affect them to gain transformative values.

In this research, I will study how the profile of the students including their working experience, education experience, expectation and motivation, and learning attitude will affect the learning outcomes. In particular, I will study how and why students with different backgrounds are transformed.

#### 2.4.3 The Learning Journey (Experiences)

The past literature has identified that transformative learning can occur gradually through a

series of experiences or it can happen when a drastic event is encountered by the participants. While the events that trigger one to transform have been identified as life-impact events, these events have not yet been examined by the researchers. For instance, how are these events related to their profiles? Based on the past research work, the EMBA experience is mainly determined by the encounter of other participants, professors and the activities that are derived on different pedagogy.

In the past literature, it is mentioned that many Professors do not perform a proper job in training students to be better managers as they are lacking actual business experiences. Hence, these Professors can only teach theories that they have never applied before. Additionally, the pedagogy that they have is too knowledge and skill based. Hence, these professors cannot facilitate participants to become better managers and cannot affect directly or indirectly the experiences that EMBA students encountered.

Equally important, the pedagogy that a Professor selected will directly and indirectly impact on the encounters of the students, and hence affecting the outcomes of the learning process. From a transformative learning's point of view, Professors should play an important role in facilitating transformative learning by selecting the right pedagogy. They should facilitate students to rethink their assumptions and to develop an open and honest learning atmosphere. In fact, it has been claimed that the right mixture of learning approaches can facilitate transformative learning. For instance, Professors may add in self-awareness and reflective activities to facilitate transformation.

To facilitate transformative learning, Professors should not use an authoritative and assertive teaching style. Most important, Professors should develop an open and trusting relationship with the students. In other words, Professors should be a facilitator more than an authoritative figure.

Moreover, researchers have also claimed that different pedagogy can create different opportunities for interaction among students and Professors, and consequently facilitate group sharing and exchanging. Thus, transformative learning can be facilitated by the pedagogy used

and the facilitation of the professors.

While EMBA students are business leaders, they may have diversified working and education experiences. Group sharing with business leaders have been identified as a critical factor for transformative learning. However, the past research has not shown in detail about how this kind of sharing and interaction can be implemented more effectively. Additionally, all EMBA participants are leaders with high social status, it is not easy for them to exchange or even accept the views of the others.

In this research, I will identify and analyze the triggering events of the students during the EMBA learning journey. The role of the interaction among the students and professors and the impact of the different pedagogy on transformative learning in the EMBA setting will be studied.

#### 2.4.4 The Learning Environment (Atmosphere)

It is understood that the different learning process aims to achieve different outcomes. However, most of the past literature focuses on understanding how EMBA participants can acquire the right kind of knowledge and skills. There is a lack of literature that examines how the EMBA learning environment (atmosphere) can transform students. The research related to transformative learning has only provided principles about how transformative learning occurs without giving the implementation insights in a learning environment that can achieve transformative learning. For instance, Jack Mezirow has developed its ten steps process for transformation. It is believed students should start transforming with an orientation dilemma followed by a self-reflection process. After the reexamination of their assumptions or values, they may change their perspectives. It is also identified that students can be transformed more effectively if they are ready to change themselves. While the whole process appears to be quite personal and some researchers have argued that transformation should be facilitated by the learning environment. However, there is a lack of insights on how should the learning environment be set to facilitate transformative learning.

According to past research, students with equal right to express themselves in a non-threatening atmosphere will facilitate transformative learning. It is critical that students can discourse in an environment without threat. While there are different approaches to understanding transformative learning, this research will use the insights gained from different researchers as a lens to understand the transformative learning process in the EMBA program. In particular, it intends to use Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theories as the base to analyze the transformative learning environment of the EMBA program. More importantly, the past literature does not identify the details about "how" and "why" people are transformed. There are limited insights into the conditions or learning environment that can participants in the setting of an EMBA program. In this research, I will attempt to gain insights into how the learning environment can cause transformative learning effectively. In particular, I will also examine how the learning environment should be implemented.

#### 2.4.5 Summary

Transformative learning can occur based on different conditions, and the transformative process may be different. It may be triggered rationally, emotionally and spiritually. While there are many debates on how transformative learning occurs, how different teaching settings should be applied, and how individual and social impact will take place, the core assumptions are all related to "good" teaching practices (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Therefore, not everyone should have to go through the same process or steps proposed by Mezirow (1978a, 1978b).

While Mezirow (1978a, 1978b) has proposed a ten-step approach for transformative learning to occur, there is a lack of the insights relating to how other people such as the teachers and the other learnings can take part in the transformative learning process. Additionally, it has not acknowledged the importance of facilitation. He has not taken into the consideration of different needs and learning style of each individual. The settings for transformative learning have not been mentioned. Recently, Hoggan et al. (2017) argued that with the rapid changes in the environment, researchers should broaden their views on how transformation can occur. So,

transformative learning does not necessarily start with an “orientation dilemma” as proposed by Mezirow.

In this research, I will compare the transformative outcomes contributed by the EMBA program with the existing literature. In particular, I will compare the ten steps of transformation proposed by Mezirow (1978a, 1978b) against the EMBA experiences of the interviewees. Also, I will check if the interviewees have similar EMBA experiences as identified by the other researchers in the context of Western education. Then, I will identify what conditions are facilitating transformative learning in the context of the EMBA program. Finally, I will also identify the challenges or barriers that block the desired outcomes of transformative learning identified by different researchers. I will start to ask their motivation and expectation of the program. That is, I want to know if they are in the program just looking for instrumental learning. Or, they are ready or expect to transform themselves to a certain extent. Then, I will start to ask them about their learning journey to identify the events that have triggered them to be transformed. After that, I will ask if their identities have been transformed as Illeris (2014) believes that identity will be changed after going through transformative learning. Then, I will ask them to discuss the learning environment and pedagogy to understand how transformative learning can be facilitated. To identify the values and the meaning of the EMBA participants, I will also ask them what they think are the overall values of the program that may have not been mentioned in the existing literature.

## Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This chapter reports and discusses the approaches that have been used in this research. First, the research strategy is discussed. Then, the selected approaches to conduct this research are justified. Finally, the details of the data collection procedures including the sampling method, the data collection and analysis are discussed.

Research has been defined in different ways by different researchers. Usher (1996) defined research as a systematic approach or process to investigate specific problems. To be a good researcher, one should have an in-depth understanding about the philosophical assumptions, the ontology (the nature of the world) assumptions and the epistemological assumptions (the nature of knowledge) of the different approaches.

### 3.1 Type of Research and its Application

Research methodology can broadly be classified into two types, namely, qualitative and quantitative research. However, the mixed method which uses both qualitative and quantitative approach in the same research can also be used.

Among the quantitative research methodologies, positivism is the most widely used and can be classified as a quantitative research methodology. From a Positivist perspective, the aim is to understand why an event has occurred and try to predict the outcomes of the events. Within a Positivist perspective research, findings are separate and independent from the researchers. The findings of the research can be repeated by other researchers. It also assumes that reality is stable, and hence, phenomena discovered is repeatable, measurable and predictable. Therefore, positivists tend to use statistics and other quantitative tools as its goal is to generalize the findings where possible (Bassey, 1999).

However, Usher (1996, p. 18) argues that there are other approaches to conduct research from different perspectives such as hermeneutics with an emphasis on the interpretation of meaning and belief that researchers are not totally independent from reality. In fact, the researcher or

observers may play a role and affect what they study. They may even interpret the world differently and subjectively. As stated by Usher (1996, p. 18)

“Hermeneutics (interpretive) research assume human actions are meaningful and hence have to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices”

Hence, hermeneutics researchers believe that there are multiple views on reality and different meanings of human actions may be discovered by different researchers. This type of research is usually qualitative as it requires researchers to gain insights through the in-depth understanding of the meaning of experiences encountered by other people. It aims to identify possibility rather than generalization.

The research of this thesis does not attempt to generalize the results but instead, it would focus to identify the meaning and values of the events encountered by participants. It is also believed that there are multiple views of reality. The observers may have different views of interpretation on the reality and the result generated depends on the interpretative framework used. More importantly, it is believed that the observer is part of the research and can change what they observe. Most of the research related to transformative learning can be classified in this category. As this research also aims to identify the values and meanings of the EMBA program and to gain into insights into how learners are transformed rather than generalize the results, therefore, the hermeneutics approach is used to conduct this research.

## 3.2 Research Strategy

### 3.2.1 Justification of using the case study as the research approach

Though this research fits within the category of qualitative approach, I still have to select the right research approach among different qualitative research approaches. Yin (2003, 2009) has asserted that a researcher should take into consideration the form of the questions, the control of behavioral events and finally the contemporary events. According to Yin (2009), insights can be gained using case studies when the research attempts to answer questions related to



“how” and “why” through examining events that have occurred in a period of time.

In this research, I have attempted to gain insights in answering why participants enroll in the EMBA program and how transformation can occur during the time when they are in the EMBA journey. Therefore, the case study approach fits well in terms of achieving the objectives and answering the research questions. It was expected that more detailed insights can be gained through the learning experiences of EMBA participants. The case that I had chosen for this research is the EMBA program that I have involved as the director. One reason behind is that it is one of the two local EMBA programs that has no partnership with overseas Universities and most of the participants are actually business leaders from Hong Kong. After that, I had to select the right approach to collect the data as there are many tools available to collect qualitative data. For example, interviews, observations and narrative reports can be used (Punch, 2005). Since this research aims to understand the meaning and experiences of the EMBA participants, I had to ensure the complexities and richness of the learning experiences of the interviewees can be discovered. Therefore, in-depth interviews were chosen as the data collection tool because it is flexible and researchers can gain more insights through follow up questions to understand the meaning of experiences of the interviewees.

Seidman (2006) stated that:

“At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning that they make of that description.” (p9)

Through this approach, it is expected that the interviewees will share the details of their transformative experiences. More importantly, this approach allowed me more flexibility during the interview process. To make the interviewees feel more comfortable during the interview, I used a more conversational approach. In other words, instead of reading out the questions, I used a conversational approach to ask questions.

In fact, according to Merriam and Kim (2012, p. 56), most of the transformative learning research is qualitatively based. As stated by Merriam and Kim (2012, p. 56):

“...something as personal as transformative learning and subsequent perspective transformation lends itself to qualitative or constructivist research”

The first transformative learning research was actually a qualitative study of 83 women returning back to College. In this research, Mezirow (1978a, 1978b) has developed the first grounded theory of transformative learning.

### 3.3 Data Collection

According to Seidman (2006), one can provide insights by sharing their individual experiences related to the topics under research. Through the reflection of the interviewees, researchers can gain insights into educational and social issues under investigation.

However, the conduct of the interview was quite challenging as interviewees may respond quite differently to different questions. More importantly, it may cost a lot of resources in terms of money and time. Seidman (2006) suggests each interview should be around 90 minutes to ensure interviewees will not get impatient. To ensure the interviews can be done effectively, each interview period lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The duration of the interviews depended on the interviewees' availability of time, how much detail the interviewees were willing to share and the momentum of the conversation. Moreover, to ensure the interviewees were not be sidetracked during the interview process, a list of questions which covers the five major topics to be studied was first developed. The topics under investigation were shared with the interviewees. These topics include (Appendix 1):

- 1.) The learning and working experiences of the interviewees
- 2.) The motivation and expectation of the interviewee for studying the EMBA program
- 3.) The learning journey of the EMBA program
- 4.) The values and meaning of the EMBA program
- 5.) Overall evaluation of the EMBA program.

With the approach, a more systematic and structured interview can be conducted. But at the

same time, interviewers can probe for more details under different situations and settings. The EMBA alumni were also invited to articulate their “shaping” events or critical incidents that caused them to be transformed during the interviews (Sherlock & Nathan, 2008).

### 3.3.1 Sampling Design

As this study is qualitatively based, the sampling design will be quite different from the quantitative approach. While quantitative research intends to generalize or quantify the extent of the results, qualitative research aims to gain insights and understanding about the people who are qualified to provide answers for the research. In qualitative research, the samples selected were based on whether they can support the research and fulfill the preset criteria. According to Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor (2014, p. 113), this approach is named as purposive sampling and the selection criteria are as follows:

“Purposive sampling is precisely what the name suggests. Members of a sample are chosen with a ‘purpose’ - to represent a type in relation to the key criterion”. (p. 113)

Maxwell (1996, 2009) asserts that sampling design is critical no matter if the research is quantitative or not. The samples selected must be selected based on the objectives of the research.

The profiles of EMBA participants are different from traditional students. They may even be quite different from other older learners. Their profiles are different because of their diversified background in terms of (i) education qualification (ii) experiences and influential power in their own fields and (iii) decision power in their work environment. Although many EMBA participants are senior executives with very strong academic backgrounds, quite a number of them are actually successful business leaders without a degree. For instance, an EMBA student I know, has got eight degrees from different areas and is the CEO of a renowned training school in Hong Kong. On the other hand, in the EMBA program that I conducted, I have encountered a business owner who is a non-degree holder and is running multi-billion businesses. More importantly, some of the students from my EMBA program are renowned leaders with strong

influential power in Hong Kong. Therefore, the contribution of EMBA programs to business owners may be quite different from the other traditional students who may just expect to advance their career or acquire knowledge and skills to perform better in their work environment.

To have a more holistic picture about the contribution of EMBA programs to the participants, I had segmented the interviewees into four segments based on two dimensions: degree holder versus non-degree holder and senior executive versus entrepreneur (business owner). In this research, I define entrepreneurs as business owners who have the ultimate decision power in a company. The four segments are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Background of Interviewees (Alumni) to be interviewed

	<b>Business Owner (Entrepreneur)</b>	<b>Senior Executive</b>
<b>Degree holder</b>	2 alumni	4 alumni
<b>Non-degree holder</b>	4 alumni	2 alumni

The two major criteria in selecting the interviewees were their academic qualification and their roles in their companies. To avoid any conflict of interests and to ensure that all interviewees have completed the whole EMBA learning journey, interviewees were selected from the EMBA alumni rather than current students. I have formed four categories (Table 5) as it was expected that there might be diversified opinions among interviewees with a different education background and work experiences.

### 3.3.2 Selecting the interviewees and gaining access to them

The interviewees who have met the mentioned criteria were first identified. As the director of the EMBA program that I used to conduct research, I have been continually updating the status of the alumni through formal and informal channels. Most of them have become friends of mine and have kept in touch with me for solving business and personal issues. Therefore, among those who met the criteria, I first approached those who have expressed their EMBA experiences in different formal or informal occasions. For those who have volunteered to be

interviewed by media and the University to share EMBA experiences, they were first approached as they were willing to openly share their experiences and had structured their stories through the interview processes. Student representatives who had not been interviewed were then approached as they usually will keep close contact with the University and will continually participate in different EMBA activities. In other words, I have chosen the alumni who have rich experiences with the EMBA program and are willing to share. In fact, these interviewees have shared their positive experiences about the EMBA program in front of the reporters when they were graduated. So, these interviewees have been selected because they have something to be share. The twelve interviewees were conducted during the period 12 November 2014 to 15 December 2014.

### 3.3.3 The right of the Interviewees

As I am familiar with interviewees, I called them directly and shared with them the purpose of my study. Before the start of the interview, I would get their verbal consent for audio recording in the whole interview. While there was no consent form to be signed, their verbal agreement and content have all been audio recorded.

I have also shared with them that the interviews were used solely for research purpose and would not be used for promotion or other usages. Their participation was strictly on a voluntary basis and would not affect their relationship with the University at all.

At the beginning of the interview, I would restate the purpose of the research and stated that they were allowed to withdraw from the interview at any stage of the interview. It was clearly explained that data would be kept strictly confidential.

In fact, during an interview, an interviewee has complained against the policies of the University. I have asked her if she wanted to withdraw from the interview immediately. Fortunately, she has agreed the EMBA experience was worthy to be shared and should not be mixed up with the policies of the University.

### 3.3.4 Language to be used for Interview

As all interviewees selected grew up in Hong Kong, they are all influenced strongly by both Chinese and British culture. All of them can articulate in Cantonese and generally have a good command of English. However, they are also accustomed to using some English terms in their daily life. They may not even know how to translate these terms into Chinese or vice versa. Quite often, they would use English terms to supplement their Cantonese in their daily life. Thus, the interviewees would feel the most comfortable if they were allowed to use Cantonese supplemented with English terms to express themselves especially when they had to share their emotions.

I have asked the interviewees to review the notes dropped during the interview to ensure what had been translated was consistent with what they had said. Major points were also written down by myself and a student helper for two purposes. On one hand, it helped to identify the key points for thematic analysis later. On the other hand, the notes can be served as a backup document.

### 3.3.5 Data Collection Process

Selected alumni or interviewees, who had satisfied the criteria, were first contacted by telephone to get their consent. They were informed that their interview would only be used for research purpose and their names would not be disclosed. Interview questions were distributed to them for reference before the actual interviews took place. I invited a student helper to assist audio recording and to take down notes.

The whole interview process for each person was about 45mins to 60mins. To ensure that the interviewees were comfortable with the interview process, they were invited to join the interview at the office of the college of business at the University where they had attended their EMBA programs.

Before the interview, all the interviewees were told that they were treated equally and

respectfully independent of their background, especially their social status and influencing power. As the interview was semi-structured, follow-up questions were also asked. However, it was ensured that all questions would not intrude on their privacy and all interviewees had the right to answer any questions. Also, the duration of the interviews was minimized.

For each interview, I and my helper had consistently conducted the interview based on the following procedure:

1. Check recorder to ensure the voice can be recorded properly
2. Transfer the audio data file to a computer after the interview
3. Transcribe the audio data into the text file
4. If necessary, I will call up the interviewees for clarification after the interview
5. Delete the irrelevant data. For example, suggestions for promoting EMBA
6. Review the transcript to ensure no important points have left out

As mentioned before, interviewees mainly answered the questions in Cantonese, the mother tongue of the interviewees. So there may exist a gap between the final transcripts and the actual interviews due to the limitation of translation (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In fact, equivalent terms may not be found when Cantonese was translated into English. Thus, the transcription was focused on translating the ideas rather than conducting word by word translation.

To ensure the idea of the interviewees has well been translated and properly reflected what interviewees intended to say, interviewees were asked to read the questions written in English before the interviews started. As all interviewees could understand both Cantonese and English, they were also asked to comment and feedback in case there were words they were not sure about exactly the meaning of the questions. I then translated the questions into Cantonese and further explained the meaning of the questions. As Hong Kong people were used to use the mixed mode, namely, Cantonese and English, in daily communication, the translation did not form a hurdle to the interview process.

Two pilot interviews were also conducted to ensure the questions asked were understandable and capable to be answered. Both pilots were done smoothly as they were well prepared for the questions I presented to them before. Nevertheless, they had once in a while sidetracked to talk about their opinions about the policies of the University. In fact, they had even suggested



some new ideas to change the program. I had to stop them and restated the purposes of the research. Wing got the perception that he should talk about the good things of the EMBA program. In fact, I had to explain to him that I needed to know about their actual experiences and the contribution of the EMBA program to them. As a result, I had told all the interviewees that the interviews were not designed to promote the EMBA program or to collect feedback or improvement suggestions.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Since this research aims to gain insights into the contribution of EMBA programs through examining the learning experiences of EMBA participants, I will focus to dig out the values and how those values can be gained. In particular, I will find out "how" and "why" EMBA participants can be transformed. I have chosen to use thematic analysis to avoid biasing to any existing theoretical framework. With this approach, it is expected to find more insights through analyzing the learning experiences of EMBA participants (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

Braun and Clarke (2012, p79) define thematic analysis as:

“A method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data.”

Thus, thematic analysis is a good fit tool for exploratory research as it emphasizes on understanding the meaning and values of EMBA participants' learning experiences.

Following the procedure proposed by Braun & Clarke (2012), I have taken the following six steps to analyze the scripts:

#### **Step 1: Review the scripts to get familiar with them**

I was quite familiar with the interviewees as I have been the EMBA director for many years, yet the interviewees had told me many things that I had never known before. Therefore, the first thing I had to do was to get familiar with the script. I had read and reread the scripts many times to ensure I had a good understanding of what they expressed (Appendix 2).

**Step 2: Code the transcripts based on the objectives of the research.**

As I was reading the scripts, I also had to code the scripts. A code may be an incident, an idea or a piece of relevant information. While some of my codes were done based on the literature review, I tried not to be biased by the existing research work, but formulate the codes based on the transcripts. So, the first draft coding scheme was formed. Then, I had to review the codes again and take away those that were repeated. In the beginning, more than 200 codes had been identified. For instance, many interviewees had talked about group projects and learning with diversified talents when answering different questions. Additionally, codes with similar ideas were combined. After eliminating those that were repeated, 150 codes had been retained (Appendix 3).

Table 6 The Organizing Themes and the Basic Themes

<b>Organizing Themes</b>	<b>Basic Themes</b>
<b>Values and Meaning of EMBA program</b> <b>(Global Theme)</b>	1. Source of Opportunities
	2. Career Transformation/Development
	3. Management Style Transformation
	4. New Habit of Thinking
	5. Personal Development
	6. Facing New Challenge
	7. Business Intelligence
	8. New Knowledge & Skills
	9. Relationship with Others
	10. New Identity
	11. Life Impact Journey
<b>Challenges to Learning</b>	12. Unfamiliar subjects
	13. Team Management (Compromise in Teams)
	14. Cost of Program
	15. Location and Schedule
	16. Time Management (Balance of life commitment)
<b>Facilitation to Learning</b>	17. Learner as Facilitator & Peacemaker
	18. Learning Atmosphere (Friendly, Open & Honest)
	19. Learning attitude
	20. Pedagogy
<b>Personal Learning Drivers</b>	21. Motivations & Expectations
	22. Opportunities of Practicing
	23. Past Learning & Working Experiences
	24. Personal Issues

### **Step 3: Group the codes into basic themes**

Then the codes were grouped into basic themes. I first developed the basic themes with reference to the articles that discussed the values of the EMBA. However, as I reviewed the coding again, I developed my own codes based on the data collected. I wanted to make sure that I would not be bounded by the articles that I had reviewed before.

As I would like to identify the similarities among all the interviewees, I examined the code and referred to the transcript again to ensure the themes formed were reasonable and not due to my subjective judgment.

All the basic codes were then reviewed to ensure that they were not overlapped. I had also asked two interviewees and an EMBA Professor to review the basic codes for me to ensure that the themes did make sense to them.

### **Step 4: Group the basic themes into the global themes**

In this step, I further group the basic themes into organizing themes. At the same time, I reviewed the basic themes again to check if the themes should be reorganized or additional themes had to be added. I finally group all the basic themes into a global theme and three organizing themes. The global theme is composed of the basics themes that are related to the values of the EMBA program. The other organizing themes are based on how these values are achieved. The organization themes include (i) challenge to learning (ii) facilitation to learning and (iii) personal learning drivers and issues (Table 6).

### **Step 5: Develop the thematic networks**

The thematic networks are then developed as shown in Figure 2. The global theme is the “Values of EMBA program” which summarized the overall theme of this study. The basic themes connected to the “Values of EMBA program” are the ones that talked about the values of the EMBA program. The basic themes outside the rectangle are the factors affecting how those values are achieved. These three themes are: “Challenge to learning”, “Facilitation to

learning” and “Personal issues/drivers of the learner”.

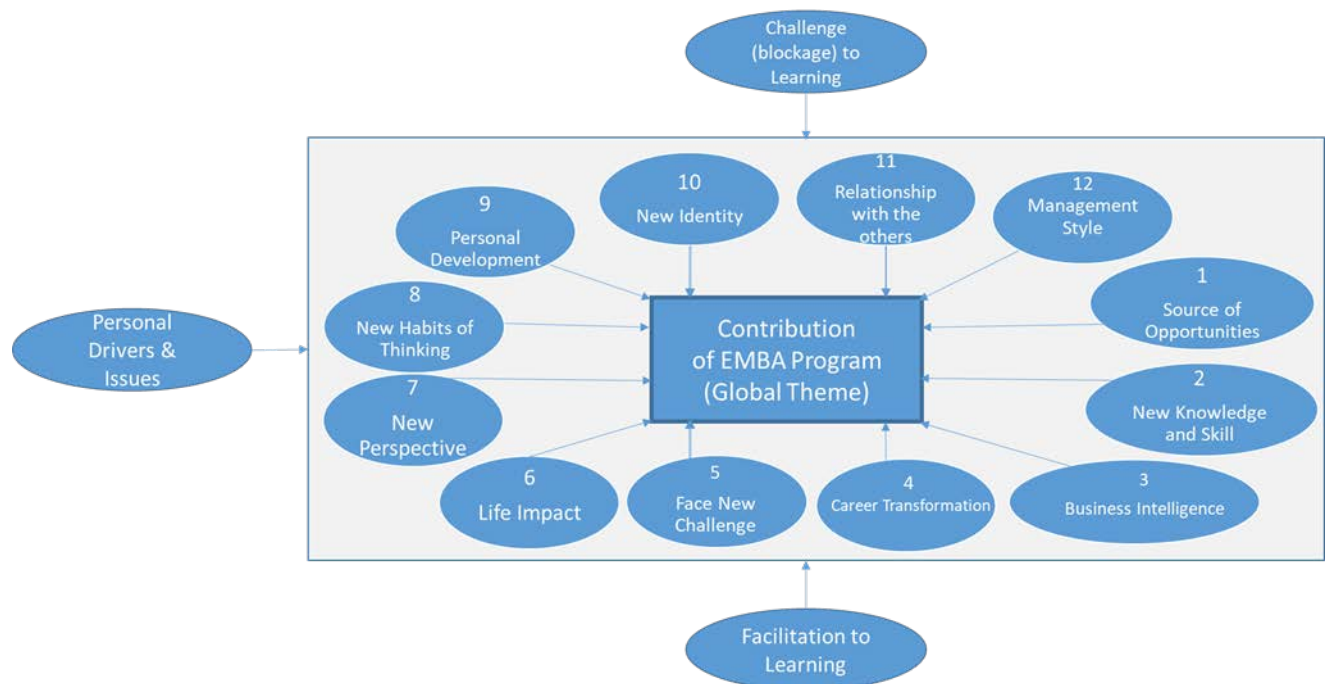


Figure 2 The Thematic Network Models

### Step 6: Summarize and interpret the networks

The networks were then summarized and interpreted based on the themes identified and the literature review (Figure 2). Each theme will be discussed in the following sessions. In Chapter 6, I would discuss the findings in this study in detail.

## 3.5 Ethical Issues

This research was based on the willingness of the EMBA alumni to participate. As they were senior executives and business leaders, I had to gain their trust so that they could honestly and openly share with me. In particular, I needed to assure them that all the data and information collected would be kept confidential.

Being the EMBA director, interviewees who used to be my students, might not feel comfortable to freely express their emotion about their EMBA journey. In particular, they might not like to share negative incidents that were related to me directly or indirectly to maintain a good relationship. In Chinese culture, many students would consider: "Once a teacher, always a teacher." So, it might happen that the interviewers will have control over the interviewees.

To remedy this situation, all the interviewees selected have been graduated for at least two years. The reason for this approach is that according to the regulations of the University, grades or classification of students will not be remedied after one year if no complaints against the grade are issued. Also, they will be checked to assure there is no conflict of interest at different levels of different units of the University.

To protect the right to privacy of interviewees, they were issued a letter (Appendix 5) before the interview promising the strictest confidentiality of all the information provided (Kimmel, 1988). In the letter, it was also indicated that their identities will be protected in my thesis by using a pseudonym. Interviewees were given the opportunity to verify the information at the drafting stage, and a final report would be provided at request (Bell, 1991).

Before the interview, the purpose of the research and the confidential agreement were informed to the interviewees as stated in the data collection process. To ensure that interviewees would feel free to answer questions, informed consent was obtained. It was also agreed that the interviewees could stop the interview process at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The procedure of the whole interview process was also explained clearly. I first assured the interviewees that all information collected would be used for this research only and would not be released to any third parties. The reasons for choosing them as respondents were well explained.

As most of the interviewees are alumni who are grateful to the EMBA program, they are all very positive and cooperative during the interviews. In fact, everyone was comfortable with the setting and audio recording. All planned and followed up questions were answered by the

interviewees. The only challenge was that they did mix up with the purpose of the research and tended to say only good things about the EMBA program. Therefore, I had to restate the purpose of the research and asked them to talk about how they felt free.

At the end of the interview, interviewees were asked if they had any questions to ask us or anything that they would like to clarify further to avoid any miscommunication.

In summary, all the interviews had been conducted to avoid violating any ethical issues and interviewees were satisfied with the whole interview process without any complaints.

### 3.6 Research Positioning

Recently, researchers are also concerned about the positioning of the researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993; Nakata, 2009; Witcher, 2010). According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), the positionality of the researcher should reflect the position that the researcher has chosen in a certain research project. It can be affected by the researchers' individual worldview, belief, and experiences (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Savin-Baden & Howell, 2013).

I understand that it is very difficult to stay neutral when conducting research. My way of collecting data, analyzing the data and interpreting the data are influenced by my own values, belief, and experiences (Carr, 1995).

I have been an EMBA director for more than 15 years and am responsible for assuring the quality of learning. At the same time, I am also concurrently an instructor in the EMBA program for more than 20 years. Prior to my appointment as EMBA director, I have been the associate director of the EMBA program for five years. In other words, I have played the role of an academic administrator and also a teaching staff. Thus, my EMBA students will share with me their academic challenges and excitement. On the other hand, when my EMBA students encounter challenges in their life, they would ask me for consultation as the difficulties they encounter may also affect their academic performance. To a certain extent, I am an insider

of the EMBA program as I consider all EMBA students as learning partners; we all contribute together to construct knowledge together. However, I am also an outsider as I have never been an EMBA student. I have been trained and educated in the fields of science and engineering from my undergraduate degree until my Ph.D. degree. More importantly, I pursued all my degrees in full-time mode. That is, I never have the experience of being an EMBA student who has to go through all the assessments, projects and dealing with conflicts among the participants. In particular, I do not have experience of being a part-time student who has to balance family commitment, working commitment, and academic commitment.

In this research, I wanted to be an outsider to gain more objective insights. Nevertheless, to understand the values of EMBA, I had chosen those who shared with me the values that they had gained from the EMBA. During the interview process, I attempted to be an outsider, and I would ask the interviewees about the EMBA experiences from different perspectives. My advantage of being an EMBA director in this research is that I know their learning experiences, their culture and even their attitude towards the EMBA programs. As I have never been an EMBA student, I believe that my understandings of the EMBA program can be quite different from a student. Thus, I wanted to know why and how they have been transformed throughout the EMBA learning journey.

All the interviewees of the research are the alumni of the EMBA program under my supervision. So, I have to be aware that they might tend to say something positive about the program to please me as I am the EMBA director. Or, I might unconsciously push them to say something positive which I thought was valuable.

Fortunately, all the interviewees had been graduated for at least two years during the time when I collected the data. The conflict can be avoided as all the academic performance or honor awards will not be altered after two years, in other words, there will be very little conflict of interest. Before the interview, I have also mentioned that the data collected will be used for research purpose to ensure that they can freely express themselves.

I am aware that as the EMBA director for so many years, I tend to promote the values of the



EMBA program. In fact, I want people to know that EMBA is much more than just a social network and a source of knowledge. However, as a researcher, I have to stay neutral and not to lead the interviewees to say something that is consistent with my own belief.

As the director, I have been asked the interviewees about their feelings about the EMBA program throughout their EMBA learning journey. Some of the stories that they shared with me had once been used for promoting the program. I have to state very clearly that all the data collected during the interview will not be used for promotion.

As I am involved in designing and implementing the program, I have a good understanding of what they may have gone through in terms of the learning experiences. Thus, I can ask for more meaningful and insightful questions. Interviewees feel more comfortable in expressing their feelings as a trusting relationship has been developed. However, I must be aware that I might get trapped in concluding something that is not discovered throughout the research process. Also, I may miss some of the points which an outsider would not miss as I am too familiar with the program.

### 3.6.1 Summary

In summary, I have taken advantage of being an insider, but, at the same time, I am cautious not to be biased by my experiences and belief. Also, I have to acknowledge that I am an outsider when investigating about the interactions among the students and the challenges that they have gone through as a part-time student who may have different life commitments to be met.

## Chapter 4. Findings: Individual Case Analysis (Entrepreneurs)

As mentioned in the last chapter, three interviewees of each category defined in the last chapter have been selected. Altogether, 12 EMBA alumni with different working experiences and education levels were interviewed. All the names used are pseudonym (Appendix 4) to preserve confidentiality. Their profiles are summarized at (Table 7).

Table 7 Profile of the Interviewees

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Place of Education</b>	<b>Job Before EMBA</b>	<b>Job After EMBA</b>	<b>Year Obtained the EMBA</b>
1. James	M	Bachelor	Hong Kong	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	2008
2. Katie	F	High Diploma	Hong Kong	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	2014
3. Harry	M	Certificate	Hong Kong	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	2007
4. Christy	F	Bachelor	Hong Kong	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	2012
5. Angel	F	High Diploma	Hong Kong	Executive	Entrepreneur	2014
6. Bob	M	High School	Hong Kong	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	2014
7. Tommy	M	Bachelor	China	Engineer	Manager	1999
8. Allan	M	High School	Hong Kong	Executive	Unit Head	2005
9. Edward	M	Master	Hong Kong	Executive	General Manager	2010
10. Jan	F	High School	Hong Kong	Executive	Consultant	2008
11. Doris	F	Master	Hong Kong	Executive	Consultant	2010
12. Mary	F	Master	Hong Kong	Executive	IT Unit Head	2010

This chapter will show the results mainly based on the individual case analysis showing their (i) profile, (ii) motivation and expectation, (iii) learning journey, (iv) overall values and meaning of the EMBA program to the interviewees. A within-case thematic analysis will be shown for each interviewee. As mentioned before, the experiences of business owners and executives can be quite different as the former ones can apply what they have learned immediately. However, senior executives may be blocked to apply what they have learned by the policies and regulations imposed by their corporations. So, I will first discuss the individual findings of entrepreneurs in this Chapter. The findings of non-entrepreneurs will be discussed in the next Chapter. After that, a comparison of individual cases will be discussed and summarized.

For each individual, I will first introduce the profile followed by their expectation and motivation for studying the EMBA program. Then, I will discuss about their learning journeys and the transformation that have occurred on them. Finally, I will discuss the overall values of the EMBA program to them. The number next to the quotes are the page number of the interview transcripts.

## 4.1 Mr. James: From Construction worker to Business Owner

### 4.1.1 Profile

James was a construction professional who graduated from Polytechnic with a higher diploma in structural engineering before joining the EMBA program. He also has obtained a bachelor from the Open University of Hong Kong. After completing successfully a number of significant construction projects, he was assigned to expand his job responsibility to marketing and administration. With 20 years' experiences in construction, he landed in a small company in steel framework business and served as top management over there. Before joining the EMBA program, he had also studied at another University to enrich his business knowledge and skills. He graduated with the EMBA degree in 2009.

#### 4.1.2 Motivation

After a long history of working in the construction industry, James would like to become a business owner instead of an employee. With the success of implementing a couple of significant construction projects, James's company has become a leader in the construction field, and the company was getting larger and larger. Being a leader in the field, James found it difficult to gain new ideas and did not know what direction he should go forward. He recalled:

At that time, I thought I had reached a crossroad junction in my life...I cannot get any new experience or new ideas from others to develop my company. Therefore, I thought I need to further my study, or others will chase after me or even take over me. (p.15)

#### 4.1.3 Expectation

James's first degree is an undergraduate degree in business. He found that the knowledge that he had acquired was too theoretical and could not be applied in his own business. With the recommendation of a friend, he has decided to join the EMBA program with the expectation to gain some solid practical knowledge. James said:

I did grab some knowledge from there, but most of them were quite theoretical... textbook theories only. So ...to join the EMBA program to gain some solid practical knowledge. (p.16)

#### 4.1.4 Learning Journey

##### *4.1.4.1 Knowledge and Skills acquired*

James found the EMBA journey enjoyable and was not as tough as perceived by the others. He highlighted that he should have taken the journey earlier as it had been a great help to run his business in many ways. For every class, he would get advice from professors and classmates on the problems he encountered in his company. After the class, he would use the theories learned to validate if he had conducted the "right" management practices. He stated:

As an entrepreneur, we got our concepts regarding our own experience, but we do not know whether they were right or not. However, during lectures, we knew we were right. On the other hand, when you came across some real world problems, you could discuss with Professors and learning partners (classmates)” (p.16)

Regarding my own company, in comparison, it was a small business, what we learned were those typical cases in textbooks. It was valuable for us to look at those giants. Through case studies, we were not just taking lectures. Instead, we look at real companies; it had expanded my horizon... (p.17)

James was excited to apply what he had learned in the class. He found the skills acquired were practical and could be implemented in real situations. He studied the negotiation skills that he had gained in the class and implemented the skills immediately the following day. The results were just surprising as he had saved a significant amount of money by applying what he had learned. He claimed:

As far as I can remember when I studied negotiation, I used it the following day when I had to negotiate with a client. During the negotiation, I used two to three more minutes to try out the skills that I learned. The result was I gained three hundred thousand more than I expected. I was delighted. I even marked it down in my diary as well as in my textbook.” (p.16)

#### 4.1.5 Transformative Experiences

##### 4.1.5.1 Identity Transformation

James noted that his identity in the view of the others had been changed after the EMBA program. His friends thought he was different and even smarter. Even his family members have more confidence in him.

My friends think I am different, smarter. Even my wife, she has more confidence in me. My status in the family was further upgraded. (p.20)

##### 4.1.5.2 Perspectives on Transformation

Though James mentioned that the program had not taught them a lot of business skills and knowledge, he could look at things from different views and perspective through the interaction with Professors and other classmates. In a sense, James has been transformed as he is willing to examine different perspectives and views. Though he did not mention how the transformation had happened, he did mention the outcomes were due to the interaction with professors and classmates. He added that:

The program might not teach you a lot. However, through the discussions with professors and learning partners, you got different perspectives and views. (p.17)

#### *4.1.5.3 Personal Development*

He has mentioned several times that his confidence has been further improved. Due to his changes in the view of the others, he has convinced many friends to start formal study again. In fact, he has become the mentor of many others. He mentioned:

After you had gained all these ideas, your confidence increased. (p.17)

In EMBA, you meet many lifelong coaches and mentors. EMBA is a source of lifelong mentors. Many people do not have the chance to meet their mentors, or even if they meet good people, they do not have the responsibility to teach you. (p.21)

Many young people have also treated me as their mentor. (p.21)

#### *4.1.5.4 Management Style*

James believed learning is important to his company as learning is a way to improve the efficiency of a company. To motivate his subordinates to learn, he has to set up a proper learning atmosphere and environment. James has started to find out more about his subordinates such as their needs and wants so that he could build a career path for his subordinates. He said:

I now know more about my subordinates, what they need, what they want, and how to

build up their career path. (p.20)

We tried to create some learning environment for the colleagues. ...The learning atmosphere...the environment in the company improved the efficiency. (p.20)

#### *4.1.5.5 The Learning Environment for Transformation*

James has identified a couple of elements that have contributed to his changes. Firstly, it is the group project: as all EMBA learners are leaders at their company, they are used to giving orders instead of listening to the others. However, in the group discussion environment, they have to listen and adapt to others opinions. As such, James started to learn about how his subordinates think and feel as he was placed in a subordinate position. Secondly, all classmates were from different industries and companies. Therefore, one could hear different views and opinions which could stimulate James to rethink and reexamine if his management practices should be adjusted. He learned:

... the group project, you know, co-operation is an art, we were all bosses; we usually give orders... we needed some time to adjust. We tried to adapt to each other. Because of that, we had the chance to know how our subordinates feel and think. (p.17, 18)

#### *4.1.6 Overall Values of EMBA*

James emphasized that the value of EMBA may not be gained from the classroom nor the skills and knowledge acquired. The value of EMBA is that it has “trained” the students to look at things and solve problems from different angles. It can even change the habits of thinking of a student. Through the various learning experiences encountered, one starts to understand how to learn. James added:

Some of the stuff may not be learned directly from the EMBA, but the program provided us the abilities to look at cases in different ways and from different angles. (p.19)

The value of the EMBA was not just what we learn in the classroom, but the changes through the stimulation and close interactions with other experts, like professors and

learning partners. ...through the different learning experience, we can now understand how to learn. (p.20)

James started the expectation to gain knowledge and skills to keep his company competitive. In a sense, he was in a disorientation dilemma in terms of how to keep his business moving on. However, the EMBA program brought him all the values identified in the 12 themes (**Error! Reference source not found.**) except career transformation. James did not mention about his self-reflection, but he did mention one triggering event that he had encountered. This event was when he applied the negotiation skills in the real world situation. He was stunned as the negotiation process was so smooth and powerful. While his transformation did not follow precisely the ten steps proposed by Mezirow, his transformation started with an orientation dilemma and ended up developing a new perspectives on the skills and knowledge that he had learned. His transformation experiences are caused both by incremental changes and triggering events.

## 4.2 Ms. Katie: From Business Partner to Business Owner

### 4.2.1 Profile

Before joining the EMBA program, Katie had already been a partner of a French company for eight years and was responsible for taking care of the business in China and Asia. She had to manage the manufacturing line in China on behalf of the company. Her company was started in 2006. To enrich her business knowledge, she had been continually studying short executive courses. Katie managed people from diversified culture as she was dealing with a French brand, a Chinese production line, and product marketing in Asia. She graduated with an EMBA degree in 2012.



#### 4.2.2 Motivation

Katie felt that she needed more knowledge to run the company after her company has been expanded to different countries. In particular, she has to manage a team from different cultures. When the size of the company was getting bigger, the management style could not be relationship based. It needed a system to run the company. Also, Katie was looking forward to acquiring the latest management knowledge through different people, so that she could keep abreast with the latest business trends. She believed:

After four years of running my own business, I thought it was essential to learn more. Also, I thought a master degree was a must. (p.22)

#### 4.2.3 Expectation

Katie expected that the EMBA program could bring her some practical knowledge to run her business. At the same time, it could be beneficial to her social life as she could make friends with the others through discussing the latest business topics. She chooses EMBA rather than MBA because she wanted to interact with people about the same age and level of business experiences. She admitted:

I found that I was not good enough to run the business. You really need a lot of knowledge. I thought I should go back to school to learn. It was beneficial to my social life; I have more topics to contribute when chatting with others. (p.22)

#### 4.2.4 Learning Journey

##### 4.2.4.1 Knowledge and Skills Acquired

Katie mentioned that she was impressed by a Professor of Marketing as the Professor used singing as a vehicle to reinforce what he had taught. Most importantly, she has changed her perspectives on marketing. While she believed that marketing strategy such as positioning,

vision, and mission were the most important elements in marketing, she had learned that people were much more important. Once you could win the heart of individuals, you could generate profits for the company. Katie shared that:

A marketing Professor made use of the singing to recall the theme of the course, and let us memorize what he taught. I could still remember what he said: “Even you defeated the sky and earth, if you could not deal with people, you were still a loser.” That’s why I am now really more concerned about people. If you can “win” people, you can earn a profit. (p.24)

#### *4.2.4.2 Perspective Transformation*

Katie mentioned several times that she had changed her perspectives on learning. In the past, she thought there should be a hierarchy between professors and students. Professors were authorities who were supposed to teach them what to do. However, it was to her surprise that the relationships between Professors and students were partnership relationships. Students and professors interacted openly and expressed what they thought freely. Katie recalled:

I thought the biggest difference was the relationship with professors and learning partners (students). It was a very friendly interaction; we were like friends. (p.23)

Professors were open, and willing to discuss with you. Even you made mistakes; you will not feel shameful. So, the most important part about the EMBA was not the method but the attitude. It is about how Professors talk and interact with you. You feel secure to express yourself. (p. 23)

#### *4.2.4.3 Management Style Transformation*

During the interview, Katie mentioned that she appeared to be the same after she had graduated from the EMBA program. However, her management style had been changed. She was once a dictator in the company and believed top-down was an effective way to manage her business as she had no confidence with her workers. After she has graduated, she empowered her workers to make decisions, and she found it a much more effective management style. Most importantly, workers were more willing to contribute, share, and help the others. She claimed that was a breakthrough in herself through the EMBA program. Katie honestly admitted:

I was a dictator, like most Chinese, a top-down approach. However, after the EMBA, I had changed. I was more positive and gave them (subordinates) the opportunities to try out new things. People work much better when they are willing to work. You need not push. This concept made an 180-degree turn in management style, a significant breakthrough for myself. (p.24)

The most important thing was that it provided us (workers and Katie) a chance to understand each other. You are more willing to share, to contribute, and try to help each other. (p.24)

#### *4.2.4.4 Transformative learning environment*

Katie emphasized that she enjoyed the learning journey of the EMBA program as she felt secure to express freely with learning partners (students) and professors. Katie further explained:

Professors were open, and willing to discuss with you. Even you made mistakes; you will not feel shameful. So, the most important part about the EMBA was not the method but the attitude. It is about how Professors talk and interact with you. You feel secure to express yourself. (p.23)

#### *4.2.5 Overall values of EMBA Program*

To Katie, the overall values are not gained through acquiring knowledge and skills even though the EMBA program would cover all the essential business knowledge. For sure, one can gain some business skills and knowledge in the classroom setting. However, one could gain more from informal learning, and in fact, one can learn something unconsciously, a phenomena that one does not expect. To some degree, unintended learning outcomes such as people skills has contributed a lot to the EMBA program. Katie stated that what one could gain from the EMBA also depends on the role of the learner in a company. As an entrepreneur, Katie could apply what she learned without constrained by the hierarchy and policies of the company and appreciated the values of what she had learned. Katie concluded:

Of course, EMBA is about business; therefore, every piece of business knowledge should be covered. Even you are not working so hard, at least you will learn something in it. However, I think it is more than that... something more than business. For instance, people skills are not learned from class, but from other student activities or informal learning environment. You learned it unconsciously; it is not in my expectation, it was a

bonus that has impacted my life. (p.25, 26)

Katie was motivated and expected to acquire new knowledge and skills to run her business. Other than acquired skills and knowledge, she admitted that her management style has been changed and even her subordinates have noted that. Her transformation was incremental. However, she did admit that the role of a learner in a company was a factor that affected how much one could gain from the EMBA program. Again, she pointed out that she could see the impact of the new skills and knowledge on her company as she was the owner.

Katie has mentioned a couple of times that she appreciated her relationship with her classmates. Her experiences actually echoed what Elliott & Reynolds (2002) claimed. To implement transformative learning effectively, teachers establish a close relationship with students. It also aligned with the claims of Cranton (1994b, 2006, 2009) as it is believed that transformative learning can be facilitated through the authentic relationship. She actually learned a lot in informal gathering outside classroom. Her experiences were similar to what Hay and Hodgkinson (2008) reported. They identified that many benefits of the MBA programs may be gained from informal learning.

### 4.3 Harry: From traditional owner to delegated businessman

#### 4.3.1 Profile

Harry has been a business owner since his graduation from high school. He has never worked for other people before. He has run many types of business such as real estates and factories. After he has graduated from the EMBA program in 2007, he opened his retail business.

Harry had his secondary school education in China, and later earned a certificate in electric and machinery. He had also spent one year in Macau to study business but did not obtain any qualification or certificates. He joined the EMBA program in 2003.

#### 4.3.2 Motivation

Harry was motivated to study the EMBA because of a couple of reasons. He has been looking for formal education for a long time because he could foresee that more professional management was essential as he would face more challenges when his business grows bigger and bigger. Secondly, he believed that he should gain higher education to be compatible with his subordinates so that he could communicate with them more effectively. He said:

...as the business became bigger and bigger; we had to face a lot of new challenges. One of my subordinates even had a doctoral degree. (p.51)

### 4.3.3 Expectation

Harry just wanted to get into a management related program. He expected that the program could improve the quality of his management through lectures, assignment, and other activities. The ultimate goal is to keep his business running automatically and smoothly without his presence. He explained:

I expected the program could improve my management “quality” through lectures, assignments and other activities. I just wanted to make my business run automatically. Even when I am not physically there, my company could still go on smoothly. (p.51)

### 4.3.4 Learning Journey

#### 4.3.4.1 Knowledge & Skills Acquired

Harry claimed that he was a shy person. Even though he has a big business to be managed, he would only interact with a couple of subordinates whom he trusted. He preferred not even to interact with his clients. Through the regular practices in presentation required by the EMBA program, he need to present in front a big group of people. More important, he has become more open to meet with other people. He mentioned:

Even in the opening ceremony of my company, I did not show up. (p.52)

I was not good at presentation in front of a big group. Finally, I got it through practices and practices during the class (p.53)

#### *4.3.4.2 Personal Transformation*

Harry claimed that before joining the program, he did not care too much about many details when executing a plan. Now, he would talk to people, conduct research and got into details before making a decision. Harry would thoroughly analyze all the details to ensure the best results could be obtained. Harry believed:

I think I become more “mature” and “stable” now. (p.53)

#### *4.3.4.3 Identity Transformation*

Harry has not just influenced the learning attitude of his subordinates, but also his family members, especially his son. His daughter has even thought of becoming a Professor as she considers her father is a role model of learning. He said:

Also, these experiences also affected the way my children perceive me. I influenced them. I became their role model. They now got their own life targets. The target is not just earning money, but to do something that is meaningful to the society. (p.53)

#### *4.3.4.4 Management Transformation*

Harry has changed his management style significantly after the EMBA program. First, he has changed his old belief as Harry assumed that his subordinates are not capable or willing to make a decision. Secondly, he has gained the confidence in himself as well as the subordinates as he delegates more and more responsibility to their subordinates. Harry recalled:

Learning from our classmates provided me enough confidence to delegate my colleagues.

They have shown me that there are a lot of methods to complete their tasks. (p.52)

EMBA let me know how to let my staff work freely under appropriate supervision. (p.52)

Harry understood the importance of data and the research process as he had the opportunities to communicate and exchange with classmates who have gone through the similar situations or challenges. He said:

Now I understand the importance of data...I was provided the chance to share experiences with classmates...gone through a similar situation. (p.52)

#### 4.3.5 Learning Environment for Transformation

Harry, like the other interviewees, gave credit to the learning environment in which he could learn from the others. He became confident in implementing new ideas as he could always get advice from his learning partners (classmates). Even though he did not play a leadership role in group projects discussions, he always contributes new ideas and gained valuable feedback from the others. He explained:

My quality “learning partners” provided me many chances to ask, to communicate, and to learn from each other. (p.52)

Group projects were beneficial to learning. Although, sometimes we got different ideas, and different viewpoints. (p.52)

#### 4.3.6 Overall value of EMBA

Harry emphasized that EMBA is a source of opportunities and a place where you could improve one’s own life. One could become more confident to change and become a role model for the others. He concluded:

EMBA provides you numerous chances. (p.54)

But, after studying the EMBA program, I was aware of the value of education. I have more confidence now when I talk with friends or speak in front of other professionals. I would

say, for me, I have reached another level. Now, he is confident to diversify his business to retails and negotiated with multinational corporations from Japan and US. (p.53)

Harry was motivated to be enrolled in an EMBA program because he wanted to change his identity from a business owner to a business professional. He was at a disorientation dilemma as even his subordinates had a high level of education than him. He was transformed through the interactions with highly respectful business leaders. Again, his transformation occurred gradually through rational self-reflection on the new experiences obtained from his classmates. But emotionally, he has gained more confidence in diversifying his business as he believes that his classmates have become his lifelong learning mentors or consultants. Finally, he opened a Japanese retail chain in Macau. In others words, he has gone through the stages that are close to the phases that Mezirow has proposed for transformative learning.

#### 4.4 Bob: From an Entrepreneur to DBA (Doctor of Business Administration)

##### 4.4.1 Profile

Bob was a non-degree holder and had worked in several industries such as banking, logistics, and plastics. Though he had to work hard during the daytime, he had been studying different short courses to enrich his knowledge. Finally, he found that plastics industry was to his best interest and had worked in a plastics manufacturing plant. He got a diploma in plastics engineering in China. After many years of hard work, Bob has established his company in plastics. Now, he was responsible for looking into new investment opportunities rather than taking care of the daily operations. Bob had a strong determination to get into the EMBA program and had attempted three times before he was admitted. He graduated in 2014 and is presently pursuing his DBA degree.

##### 4.4.2 Motivation

For every four to five years, Bob has to set a new direction for the company in response to the new business environment. Bob would like to get new stimulation or ideas to develop a long-



term vision for his business. Additionally, he wanted to motivate his workers to keep upgrading themselves and stay abreast of the latest development of the business environment. So, he would like to be a role model of continuous learning to his workers. He explained:

...after twenty years of development, as the boss of the company, he had to come out, to explore, and to widen his vision. If you wanted your company to go further, the boss must improve himself first. (p.28)

#### 4.4.3 Expectation

Bob expected that the EMBA program could bring in new ideas such that new possibilities could be identified. He was afraid that he would miss the new business opportunities without getting the latest information on the market in time. What Bob believed was that he needed a breakthrough in his mindset to capture the market. So, the EMBA program was expected to be a source of knowledge and a platform for Bob to break through his mindset and further develop his company. He said:

If I did not take the EMBA, I still would think the company had some expanding possibilities but not much. (p.28)

I thought that a breakthrough of my mindset was what I needed. It (EMBA) was the right thing...in a right timing.” (p.28)

#### 4.4.4 Learning Journey

##### 4.4.4.1 *Knowledge and Skills Acquired*

Bob claimed that what he had acquired was definitely valuable. In fact, the knowledge that he acquired had changed his perspectives. While he used to think that the technical expertise was the key to his business, he was inspired that marketing played a critical role in a company. He claimed:

After the marketing course, we always thought about marketing.” (p.30, 31)

In other words, Bob did not just acquire the marketing skills; it had a high impact even on his management perspectives.

#### *4.4.4.2 Management Perspective*

In the corporate finance course, he learned that finance was not just about numbers or profit, he should build up on the long term relationship with the external partners. While Bob was talking about the skills and knowledge acquired, actually his perspectives had already been changed too. Alternatively, even his mindset has been changed. Bob mentioned:

When I cooperated with outside capitals, we used to just look at the profit only...now I would also look at the relationship long term benefits, not at the numbers only. We formed a management team to gather opinions. (p.31)

#### *4.4.4.3 Identity Perspective*

Though Bob did intend to be a role model of learning to his workers at the very beginning, he did not expect that his son and even family members have admired him because of his learning commitment. Bob has demonstrated that he walked what he talked to the others and become a commendable father. He proudly said:

For my family, for example, my sons, they knew their father returned back to study. They admired me because I was not just saying so, but I really did it and completed successfully. (p.31)

#### *4.4.5 Transformation Learning Environment*

Bob credited the group projects a lot as through these projects he could get to know different industries and gained better understanding and relationship with the learning partners (classmates). As group discussion always took place at different classmates' offices, Bob had a better more in-depth understanding about how the classmates conduct their business. One arrangement he did appreciate was that the groups were formed at random. In other words, he

could learn more about how to work with people from different backgrounds and consequently broadening his business horizons and perspectives. He explained:

For learning groups, we were grouped at random. It is a great arrangement! (p.30)

We conducted assignments at our learning partners' office; so we know more about our partners as well as their companies. (p.30)

#### 4.4.6 Overall Value of EMBA program

Bob stated what he had learned might not be applied immediately. But once he encountered difficulties in his business, he would associate with the case studies or framework that he has learned before.

Some concepts acquired had a lifelong impact on him. Instead of looking at short term profit in the past, he would balance between a relationship with others and the profits generated. In fact, he had applied the same principle when he evaluated if a deal should be closed or not. He said:

After the program, even when I came across some stressful situations, I would recall some of the memorable incidents that happened during that time. It helps me to face the situation. (p.30)

Bob was frustrated with changing the direction of his company every couple of years; he really wanted to know if a long term strategy could be established through gaining new knowledge and skills. Bob emphasized several times, his perspectives on doing business was transformed after acquiring his new knowledge and skills through formal classroom learning and discussion on the group projects. One thing that he emphasized was that transformation occurred when one is willing to interact with more people who are different. That is why he tried to form groups with different classmates randomly. Also, to his surprise, his transformation has made him a role model of learning to his family. However, he did not identify any triggering event that caused his transformation. But he mentioned that the environment for transformation is to interact with more people who have different backgrounds. Bob's transformative journey

appears to be rational and gradual. He had claimed that he had changed his perspectives on business, but he did not mention if he had taken any new actions because of the transformation. In other words, his transformation was not quite exactly the same as what Mezirow has proposed. However, Bob's transformative learning is close to what Illeris (2014) proposed as his identity has been changed both in his family and company life.

## 4.5 Christy: From Government Worker to Business Owner

### 4.5.1 Profile

Christy has rich working experiences and has worked in numerous different industries and positions such as government executive officer, television station marketer, fashion marketing officer and airline administrator. But mostly, she has worked in the areas related to accounting and marketing. Before joining the EMBA program, she has already set up her own company. Since it was a small company, she has to be responsible for manufacturing operations, marketing, sales and management and almost everything. Therefore, she has the opportunities to touch the finance and trade related tasks. After working for some years, Christy decided to go back to a local university for her undergraduate degree in English Literature. She could not be promoted unless she obtained a higher academic qualification. Finally, she decided to open her business to fulfill her own dream. She was an EMBA graduate in 2012.

### 4.5.2 Motivation

Being a business owner, she felt that she was lacking in professional knowledge to compete in the real world. Then, she decided to join the program to learn more and extend her network. More importantly, she wanted to understand the latest trend of the business environment. She explained:

Around 2008, I felt that the knowledge I learned was not enough. I thought I lacked professional knowledge or know-how to let me compete in the business world. (p.43)

### 4.5.3 Expectation

As the EMBA program is specially designed for adults with rich working experiences, it is expected that she could learn a lot from her classmates. Christy claimed that she was an emotional person. She preferred to study in a learning environment that cares about students. However, she did not find it in her undergraduate studies. There was a lack of human touch. However, she had got it in the EMBA program. She mentioned:

Since it is a program for adults who already got quite a lot of experience, therefore I thought I should be able to grab some knowledge from my teachers and classmates. (p.43)

I needed much care and consideration; I wanted a warm feeling. (p.44)

As I grew up in a lower social class, I felt that I had to connect with people from other social class so that I can get advice from them and further develop my business. (p.44)

### 4.5.4 Learning Journey

#### 4.5.4.1 Knowledge & Skills Acquired

Christy did not find the knowledge and skills acquired could be applied in real world situation. On the other hand, she has learned a lot from the stories (experiences) from the other nineteen classmates and the Professors. They had inspired her to develop her own visions, new concepts, new thinking and new methodologies. Christy shared:

Perhaps I was already too old, the knowledge I learned could not be utilized by me in the real world situation. (p.44)

The most significant learning was gained from the stories of my nineteen classmates and also the stories of my professors. (p.44)

#### 4.5.4.2 Personal Transformation

Christy did not have confidence with herself as compared to other classmates who she perceived were brilliant executives and entrepreneurs. However, she has changed because of

the guidance and encouragement from the Professors. It was the interaction between her and the Professors that had contributed in building her confidence. She mentioned:

I have overcome this feeling because of the motivation, guidance, and encouragement of the Professors. I really mean it. I even wanted to quit on the first day! (p.44)

#### *4.5.4.3 Identity Transformation*

Christy mentioned that she never wanted to be a leader. She always played a listener role because she was afraid of making mistakes in front of other people or putting herself in an embarrassing situation. However, she has become the student representative of the class because she wanted to serve the class and make her classmates happy. It ended up that this task became a significant task to her. She has become a leader well recognized by her Professors and classmates.

Even though her subordinates did not quite trust her ideas acquired from the EMBA program, she has gained much more trust from most of her clients. They respected Christy more than before. Christy said:

On the other hand, most of my clients trusted me. They respected me, especially after I finished my EMBA. Even my family respected me as well. Especially my cousins, because I always helped them to solve their problems. (p.46)

Even her family members respected her more as now she could provide more solutions for solving their programs. She shared that:

I was always a listener. I was terrified of making mistakes as I wanted to avoid getting into any embarrassing situations. (p.45)

#### 4.5.4.4 Management Transformation

Christy believed that the only way to get money was to work hard on your own. However, after encountering the other classmates, she realized that there are many other alternatives to make money. Some classmates also stimulated her to rethink the issues related to the balance of life. She said:

It also made me more concerned about life-balancing.

Before joining the program, I thought the only way to get money was by my own hands; 24 hours a day, I tried my best and worked hard. However, after the study, I thought that this was really a stupid idea.” (p.45)

I found that my classmates were not just using their hands to earn money, but also their smartness, their knowledge, their social networks, or even their talkative nature... This belief affected my career life, even my personal life a great deal. I have become confident that I am a leader and can be a successful leader in both my class and my business” (p.45)

#### 4.5.5 Learning Environment for Transformation

Christy was not a bit disappointed with the teaching method. She expected that she could be trained to become more vocal as she was a shy person. She was not quite confident when facing a group of classmates whom she perceived as more competent than her.

However, she found the Professors had created a warm, caring and considerate learning atmosphere. They worked with Christy without putting pressure on her. Christy felt like she was part of the EMBA family.

#### 4.5.6 Overall value of EMBA

Christy considered that the EMBA journey that has created an impact on different dimensions of her life including her career development, social life, and even personal life. The EMBA

program has gained respect from others for Christy and made her feel confident of what she has achieved. It helped her to build up strong relationships with a group of trustworthy senior executives. She wanted to keep them as her lifelong learning partners. She concluded:

At first, it made me feel that I might fail because I did not care about social relations. However, then, I thought, although I should not count myself as successful, I was not a failure case either. (p.45)

Just like the other entrepreneurs, Christy was in a disorientation dilemma. She felt that she could not make her company successful because she was lacking in professional business knowledge. She aimed only to get new knowledge and skills without even thinking about transformative learning. Nevertheless, she was touched when she learned that she was well recognized as a leader among her classmates. Her identity has been changed as she no longer considered herself as an unsuccessful leader or business lady. She was well respected by her clients, classmates, and subordinates. Her perspectives about how to make profitable business has also been changed. The transformation journey of Christy did not quite follow the Mezirow's steps even though she has changed her business perspectives. She emphasized that she was transformed because of the warm and caring learning atmosphere. However, her transformation in identity is more valuable as it really affected her life. Christy became more vocal and was more willing to share or dialog with her classmates because she was in an encouraging learning environment. This is an essential condition for transformative learning as proposed by Mezirow (1991).



## 4.6 Angel: From management consultant to business owner

### 4.6.1 Profile

Angel used to work in a multinational corporation for many years after she had graduated from high school. As a result, she had been assigned to do different types of work such as administration, marketing, and operation management and was promoted to be a unit head. Nevertheless, the work had become quite routine and lack of challenges. Angel was told that a higher academic qualification was essential for her to be further promoted as international corporations always looked for people with high education. To compensate the situation, she joined many management courses, which did not lead to any degree.

Before joining the EMBA degree, Angel had got a high diploma from a local University. In 2012, she joined the EMBA program for the sake of getting a higher degree. After that, she changed her career and became a management consultant.

### 4.6.2 Motivation

Though getting a higher degree was a primary reason why Angel wanted to join the EMBA program, she believed that she still got to explore. In particular, when her colleagues with higher degrees presented their proposals, they were much more convincing and structured. For her, she had to spend much effort to get one point through. She felt that she was lacking in a strategic framework and a methodology to organize her materials. Moreover, after working in the same field for more than 30 years, she wanted to see the world and looked for opportunities to change. She stated:

My colleagues could always use many professional terms and concepts and present in a very systematic way. But, for myself, I found that I lacked that kind of strategic or rational thinking methodology. (p.33)

I worked in the same environment for more than thirty years. I thought it was time for me to see the world...I wanted to make improvement or change. (p.34)

### 4.6.3 Expectation

Other than getting the academic qualification, Angel believed she had to prepare herself to change. To do so, she needed to gain more knowledge, skills, and information about the new business environment. Also, Angel was expecting to have networking opportunities. The EMBA program was supposed to be a source of information and network to equip herself for improving or changing.

“I had to collect information and prepare myself if I wanted to make any change.”

### 4.6.4 Learning Journey

#### 4.6.4.1 Knowledge & Skills Acquired

Angel described that the EMBA program was like a garden full of magnificent views where one could gain a variety of knowledge and experiences through interacting with new things and new people. The consultant trip, which required all teams to finish their proposal in a week was something new. In this trip, Angel had changed her role. Instead of being the leader, she had to sell the proposal to the client. To her, it was really an opportunity to reflect upon herself to understand the feeling of her subordinates in the company. Angel said:

I would say the program seems like a journey in “□ □ □ ” (literally, the Garden with a magnificent view). (p.35)

In my company I worked for, other people presented their proposals to me, but this time I had to present my proposals to the client. (p.35)

#### 4.6.4.2 Personal Development Transformation

Angel believed that she could be a management consultant by integrating her corporate

experiences and many tactics that she had learned from the EMBA program. Instead of staying as a general manager (GM) of a company, she should be a consultant for small and medium enterprises (SME) to create more impacts. She further explained:

There were many tactics that I learned during the EMBA study. That was part of the reasons why I became a management consultant instead of a GM of an SME. (p.37)

#### *4.6.4.3 Identity Transformation*

After all the EMBA training and education, her capability was more than the requirements of a general manager. She could view problems from more dimensions and provide more alternative solutions. She said that she was no longer a manager and used the term “problem solver” to describe herself. She believed:

I had become a problem solver; my spectra of knowledge enlarged, my perspective or even my habit of thinking were changed. (p.37)

My subordinates really respected my decision of transforming to be a consultant and were inspired by me. It is a positive impact on them. (p.37)

#### *4.6.4.4 Management Transformation*

Angel mentioned that her management view was changed as she was assigned to do a strategic audit for her company as one of the assignments. She claimed that she would never have done if it were not for an assignment. Because of that, she had the opportunity to examine the strategy of different units and review the company holistically. That assignment really challenges what she used to perceive about the management of her company. So, putting herself in the shoes of top management, she has to reexamine the company’s strategy as a whole. The assignment had become an opportunity for Angel to rethink what her perception was and consequently changing her view on management. She claimed:

I reviewed the strategic plans of the whole company, every unit. By doing this, I thought I put myself into a higher level of scrutinizing, the assignment changed my view on management significantly. (p.36)

#### 4.6.5 Learning Environment for Transformation

Angel emphasized several times that she had changed because she had new people with diversified talents. However, more importantly, she had built up a close relationship with them through regular communication and adaptation. For the group projects assignment, she had formed teams working with different people and different role. Therefore, she got the opportunities to reexamine the feeling and challenges of different positions. Everyone must take a turn to be leaders based on his or her expertise. One must put down the ego and put up with the others to learn effectively. She shared:

Whenever you worked with different people, they have their practice; sometimes it is quite challenging. (p.36)

Every time we played different roles based on the grouping. I have acted as an editor, a presenter, a data researcher, and also facilitator. Based on our expertise, we had different roles to play (p.36)

You have put down your ego...with great tolerance...moreover, considerate. (p.35)

#### 4.6.6 Overall value of EMBA

Angel mentioned several times about meeting new people. However, she also emphasized that all the learning partners (classmates) were different from friends she encountered in the business world. Learning partners helped her to understand herself, her values and her strength while business partners might have conflicts of interest with her. She knew that her learning partners would help her to solve her problems. The EMBA program is a life changing journey especially to those who are looking for a breakthrough. She concluded:

The study allowed me to meet a lot of new friends. They helped me further understand myself, my values, my strengths. (p.37)

Friends I knew through business activities might have a conflict of interest, but not my learning partners. (p.38)

The program also enabled me to know my life direction. Therefore I came out and set up my own business after studying the EMBA program” (p.38)

Angel also faced a life challenge as she had to decide if she should set up her business after working as senior executive for so many years. What she learned was not just the new knowledge and skills, but the structured approach to analyze a business program. More importantly, she had the opportunity to look at her business at a higher strategically view as she was assigned to do the strategy audit. One important triggering event was the consultant trip to Shanghai. With this trip, she realized that she could offer a lot to the small and medium entrepreneurs. Finally, she had set up her own consultant company after graduation. Angel's journey followed quite closely to the Mezirow's transformative steps. She started with a orientation dilemma, with the continual reflection on what she had encountered, she had changed her thinking habit and taken new action. With the consultant event, her perspectives was broadened as she knew that there were a lot of business consultant opportunities in serving SMEs. As a result, both of her career and identity have been transformed.

#### 4.7 Summary

The six interviewees in this group used to be entrepreneurs, or became entrepreneurs after completing the EMBA program. In terms of their motivation, they had a common point. They all looked for something new and were open to change. They even admitted their inadequacy in running their business and were looking for new idea or advice. In fact, some of them were facing disorientation at their career. According to Mezirow (1997), this is the first step for transformation. As a result, the interviewees looked for new roles and actions after they graduated from the EMBA program. Finally, they were transformed because they had encountered new experiences and advice from their classmates (learning partners).

Though they all started with disorientation, their paths of transformation were quite different. Both gradual transformation and event triggering did happen among the interviewees as Mezirow (2000) finally believed that transformation could occur gradually or through the crisis or triggering events that could affect one's life. For some interviewees such as Christy, her emotion played an important role in her transformation. However, for Angel, her

transformation occurs mainly through rational reflection. Both of them did mention that a critical factor for transformation was interacting with many classmates from diversified backgrounds. Additionally, one must know how to deal with conflicts and argument when conducting group projects. On the other hand, both Christy and Katie mentioned that warm and friendly learning atmosphere is a critical condition facilitating transformative learning. However, for those who have the opportunities to apply what they have learned successfully, their transformation may even be more profound as they can see the actual values of the EMBA program.

Therefore, the results are aligned with the existing research, the outcomes of transformative learning can have more perspectives or habit of thinking changes as proposed by Mezirow. In fact, the change in identity can have life impact for the interviewees. As stated earlier, their identities are not just changed to be a business professional, the perception from their subordinates and even their customers and vendors have also been changed. They are perceived as more reliable and capable. Even some of the family members of the interviewees have a fresh impression on them. Chia and Holt (2008) has argued before that MBA is an identity that creates a professional image and demonstrates the capability of a person. This is particularly important for non-degree holders who have been performing their jobs for years. They have demonstrated to their boss, subordinates and related parties that they are capable business leaders. For instance, Angel was told that she would not get any promotion unless she could get a business degree to demonstrate that she was well qualified to be a leader.

## Chapter 5. Individual Case Analysis (Non-entrepreneurs/Senior Executives)

In the last Chapter, I have discussed findings from the interviews conducted for the entrepreneurs. In this Chapter, I will discuss findings from the interviewees for the non-entrepreneurs.

### 5.1 Tommy: From Technical Engineer to Training Manager

#### 5.1.1 Profile

The first interviewee was with non-entrepreneur, Tommy, who is currently working as a program director of a financial education institute. He told us that he graduated from his EMBA program 18 years ago and had been employed in various industries and companies from entirely different cultures:

My first job was working in the NEC, handling internal IT related stuff... Progressively, I was promoted ...my responsibility area became the marketing development... in Hong Kong and China. After EMBA, I joined IBM to develop their training programs. (p.2)

Tommy had encountered different types of learning experiences when he was young. He obtained his education in a Chinese high school, which was not quite respected by the local community. As a result, he was one of the few Hong Kong students who had pursued his higher education in Physics in China. That is, Tommy had to learn everything in Chinese rather than English. However, Tommy was not satisfied with the outcome of the degree as he had a hard time getting a job with his Chinese degree. After working at NEC for many years, he was promoted to the manager position, but he was concerned about his academic credentials, “a college graduate from China.” In a sense, he was not quite satisfied with his own academic qualification and identity. More importantly, he was not comfortable to manage a team with different professions and backgrounds. Additionally, Tommy did not know how he could tackle the market in China. He said:

... at that time, I was transferring from a technical post to a management post, from taking care of a small team of technical guys to managing a department with people from different professions and different backgrounds. I did not know how to handle the department. Also, I had to oversee the Mainland and the Hong Kong market. The market was changing rapidly, but I did not know how to tackle it. (p.3)

Tommy has also mentioned that he was going through a challenging life situation. He has to take care of his family while his company was in a crisis. I felt that he has shown a bit of guilt and shame on his face during the interview. He admitted:

Compared with other students, my foundation was quite weak. Furthermore, I did not have enough time to study... it was tough. My son was just one year old; my wife was in a challenging situation. There was a crisis in my corporation, the business was tough. (p.5)

### 5.1.2 Motivation

While Tommy has a high motivation to change his identity and wanted to acquire new skills and knowledge to manage the new working environment, he was not quite sure what actions should be taken. Nevertheless, as EMBA appeared to teach business skills and knowledge, which may fulfill his needs, Tommy joined the program without in-depth understanding about what he would encounter.

### 5.1.3 Expectations

The expectations of Tommy were quite straightforward and practical as he wanted to perform a better job in his working environment and assumed that EMBA could help him to do so. He was quite open as he did not specify that he wanted to learn a particular kind of skill or knowledge. Tommy mentioned that:

I expected I could learn how to manage the whole business system in a very systematic way. I wanted to find out more so that I can manage my department and people better. (p.3,4)

### 5.1.4 Learning Journey of EMBA Program



#### *5.1.4.1 Knowledge and Skills acquired*

While Tommy has highlighted a couple aspects of knowledge and skills that have created an impact on him, knowledge gained has also transformed his thinking simultaneously. The new insights he encountered challenged him on his assumptions. For instance, he never believed that the matrix system, a commonly used management concept in corporations of U.S. companies can ever be successfully implemented. However, his peers (classmates) have shared how it could be applied to the working environment. As a result, his learning attitude has been changed. The management model, “profit service chain,” has helped him to reflect what he has experienced and learned. He mentioned:

We were studying Matrix structure. I had already worked in a Japanese firm for several decades, most of my clients were national corporates in China. I had never met any company running Matrix structure. Therefore, I doubted whether it existed in the real world. At that time, I asked my classmates. The result was that all classmates raised up their hands. Then, I understood I was dumb and needed to learn sincerely. (p.6)

Afterward, when I learned “profit service chain,” I suddenly felt everything fitted into positions; all my learning and experiences are linked up in a chain. (p.6)

#### *5.1.4.2 New Perspectives on Solving Problem*

When asking about the meaning of EMBA to Tommy, he immediately highlighted the residential trip where he was asked to be a consultant to solve a real issue for a company in China. Before that, he did not have an opportunity to apply what he had learned. However, the residential trip made him understand how “the parts” that he has learned could be implemented in solving the real issue. Before that, all the concepts and exercises were just “virtual.” It stimulated him to analyze problems using a “framework” approach, which are really beneficial to him. He said:

Before this (the residential trip) I felt what I learned were parts by parts. However, after that, it seems that all matters flowed into one piece, everything flows into positions; all I learned become chained up. It was much clearer. At that moment, I found that we can read things and things by some “framework.” It was really beneficial for me. (p.7)

#### *5.1.4.3 Management Style*

Tommy has changed his management perspectives despite the fact that he had been ingrained with the Japanese management style. He has gained different perspectives on people management. The EMBA program has prepared him to adapt to new challenges and changes. He claimed:

...before (EMBA) I just knew that I was a team leader, as a parent, I had to protect my subordinates if they could not finish a task I had to come out to help in time. After the program, I learned much more about people; people are different; communication can be different. No matter what culture and what background you are from, the working relationships are not just limited to hen and chicken. Afterward, when I was working in IBM, everyone is just a nut in the whole system; no hen, no chicken... If you did not attend the EMBA program, when I moved from a Japanese firm, NEC to an American Firm, IBM; I thought it was quite impossible for me to adapt to the change. (p.7)

#### *5.1.4.4 Personal Development*

As a conclusion, Tommy was amazed that transformation (change) could happen even for a working adult with more than 20 years of working experiences. The value of the EMBA program is not just about knowledge and skills acquired, EMBA helps people to transform or have embraced the attitude to change. It stimulates participants to rethink (self-reflect) in and on what they have experienced. As a result, one can be more confident in adapting to the changes and face the challenges. He stated:

The most important part is: the EMBA program changed the view of a working adult. I myself had already been working in the field for more than twenty years, but still able to change, it is precious. EMBA provided a chance for one to re-understand oneself, to re-understand the World... this (EMBA) is the best way to smooth your road to success, the best way to give you the confidence to deal with difficulties. (p.8)

#### *5.1.4.5 The Learning Environment*

Tommy mentioned several times that it was the people (professors and classmates) that influenced him a lot. Through the interactions with the classmates and through group projects and class discussion, and residential (consultation) trips, his horizon has been broadened. He

mentioned:

During the study, I saw something I had never come across before; some from the process of studying and some from my classmates; something new to me, it really broadened my horizon. (p.4)

...we had discussions and group work, I learned much from these activities; especially the summer consultation project we did in Shanghai. (p.4)

Nevertheless, even group activities can be useful learning tools, but it all depends on the attitude of the team members. He himself believed that everyone has talent and all team members should respect each other. But the challenge of the learning is timing. Once the team members are busy, things can go messy. He pointed out:

If we all were in high spirit with good attitudes, group projects would turn out good. However, sometimes, when the team members were busy, the situations were terrible. (p.5)

Every classmate got his talents. We all need to respect each other. Friendship is the most valuable thing. (p.5)

#### 5.1.5 Overall Values of EMBA

While the expectation of Tommy was to manage the team better, he ended up talking about the value of the EMBA program that helped his personal development. The program has provided him with a complete understanding of what business is, a broader world view and new perspectives to look at things.

During the interviews, Tommy has mentioned quite a number of times about his transformative process, but using related wordings such as “rethink,” “broaden,” and “adapt” to express that he has been personally changed. He has expressed that his professional identity has been transformed from a technical engineer to a manager. It echoes the results of Chia and Holt (2008) as the EMBA has changed the perception of the others. He is now a capable manager.

He has gained the confidence to face different challenges and has developed the courage to change. Though he has mentioned a couple of times that the EMBA has enabled him to acquire skills and knowledge, the impact of that knowledge and skills are not limited only to improving his job performance. In fact, through the encounter of these new experiences, he has reflected on his assumptions, and this leads to a change in his management perspectives.

So, the overall values of EMBA for Tommy is not just instrumental learning. His transformative experiences followed quite closely to Mezirow's ten steps. Tommy had assumed duty to a new job, which he was not familiar. He felt inadequate because of his academic qualification. Thus, he has to look for an alternative way to solve his dilemma. Though he was not quite sure what EMBA would bring him to, he joined in. The outcome was that he has built up his self-confidence to manage a diversified team. He is no longer bounded by the Japanese management perspective, which he has believed in for more than 20 years.

## 5.2 Mr. Allan: From Successful Business Leader to Professional Business Leader

### 5.2.1 Profile

Mr. Allan is a non-degree holder with extensive experience in finance and has worked all the way to being a top management position of one of the largest real estate developers. Before joining the EMBA program, he was already the CEO of a subsidiary of the company, the highest position of the enterprise. On the other hand, he understood that he would not be further promoted unless he was a family member of the owner of the company. In a sense, he has reached the dead end of his career if no further actions were taken. He got his EMBA degree in 2005, and that enabled his career to soar to a higher level.

### 5.2.2 Motivation

Allan was just a high school graduate, but through his hard work, he has picked up a lot of knowledge and skills through on the job training. He has also trained many fresh graduates and noted that many of them are handicapped in making practical decisions. Though Allan's achievement was well recognized, he just felt that he needed a higher degree to demonstrate his capability. He wanted to know if his achievement was gained through luck or his abilities. He said:

I thought I had already achieved what I wanted and it seemed that there was nothing for me to chase after. When I looked at my subordinates, some of them are chartered accountants, MBAs, BBAs... However, I, myself, regretfully did not get any formal academic qualification. Although my boss or my subordinates all respected me, I still wanted to let them know my success was not just by luck, not just by working experience, most importantly, I am capable. (p.10)

### 5.2.3 Expectation

When Allan did not have formal management education, he was assigned to take the Harvard executive education programs. He found these programs useful and practical. He joined the EMBA program that focused in China Business as he believed it was an important business

area. Although he has dealt with China business for his company; he wanted to learn more about it. Allan has a robust social network and does not need to strengthen it through the EMBA program further. He asserted:

I had chosen this EMBA program because I saw that they got a focus in Chinese Business, which I thought was important. I wanted to know more in this area. I had already dealt with Chinese business in my work. (p.11)

#### 5.2.4 Learning Journey

##### 5.2.4.1 Knowledge and Skills acquired

Allan believed that the knowledge learned from the case studies were not too practical and could not be applied in a real working environment. Though case studies were critical, the corporations of the case shared their experiences after they became successful. It was not clear how they came up with the strategy and direction at the beginning. Allan believed that all those cases just happened to be successful. He believed that there are many alternatives to develop a successful business. However, scholars just summarized what the corporations had done and claimed them as successful strategies. In other words, Allan found the knowledge and skills acquired in EMBA were just theoretical concepts. Nevertheless, Allan's presentation was improved as one has to do a lot of groups and individual assignments. He explained:

....I think, it just so happened but not a must. Chinese businessmen had their own ideas. They had their own concepts; their methodology ...no matters it is Confucius or some traditional belief or anything else. When these concepts came out, the western scholars just put them together and claimed them as their strategies, their concepts. (p.11, 12)

##### 5.2.4.2 New Identity

Allan has not gained too much academically, and he even thought that all business cases were just a waste of resources. Nevertheless, from another point of view, he has been changed. His boss believed that he was a capable rather than experienced. His friends were influenced because of his learning attitude. Allan's friends and relatives looked up to him because of his

academic achievement. He shared:

Before my study, my boss would think that I am good because I got exceptional experience; but after the EMBA training, they believed it is in my own ability. (p.13)

Many friends admired what I had achieved, and some tried to study as well. (p.14)

My family and relatives were proud of my achievement. (p.14)

#### *5.2.4.3 New Perspective*

Allan did not mention about the change of his management style, but instead, he did talk about his attitude towards others. Also, he said that he had influenced others' learning attitudes in his working environment. He said:

I became a role model among my colleagues. When they knew even seniors like me used their leisure time to study, they tried to find some suitable program for them to study.(p 15)

#### *5.2.4.4 Personal Development*

Though Allan did not find the content of EMBA too valuable, he has changed by learning more on how to consider others not only in his working environment but also in his daily life.

After the EMBA journey, whenever at work or in other daily environments, I have learned to show more concern about others' feelings and to work with others. I think this is the most valuable thing I got besides the professional knowledge. (p.13)

#### *5.2.4.5 The Learning Environment for Transformation*

Allan asserted that the criteria to get the condition for learning from EMBA is that one must have enough experience to contribute so that he can also gain from the others in return. Therefore, group projects have been the most effective way to learn from each other as team members from the diversified background will share different views on the same problem.

Allan emphasized that:

EMBA is different from MBA. One must have enough experience to contribute as well as to get the knowledge from the program. (p.14)

#### 5.2.5 Overall Values of EMBA

Allan found that EMBA is self-fulfillment process. Though he did mention that what he had learned from case studies was not practical, Allan agreed that he could gain knowledge among the classmates. To Allan, EMBA was a process for him to demonstrate that he is a capable person. He was satisfied because he has successfully changed others' perception on him. Allan stated that:

It is worthy. It is a self-fulfillment. I have become the role model among my younger friends. (p.14)

Good, but not very good. I think we should let the society know us better and have networking like those top universities. (p.14)

Allan has been learning throughout his life under different environment. He is proud of his “on the job training” which leads him from a high school graduate to become the top management of a major financial company in Hong Kong. He found his executive training at Harvard useful and practical. On the other hand, he did not find the knowledge and skills acquired at the EMBA program valuable. The experiences exchanges with other classmates were the part that Allan found meaningful. After all, Allan was still interested in further learning as he had already had stepped into the academic world. He believed that it is a waste if one stops learning after having graduated from the EMBA degree.

Overall, the EMBA program for Allan is a platform for formal learning and a ticket to go for further study. However, what motivated him is that he has been touched emotionally by the recognition of his classmates on the graduation day. He knew that his identity had been changed in the eyes of his family and his boss through the EMBA program. Allan said:

...one after one...all my learning partners voted me as the “most valuable” learning partner,



I was touched. I cried. (p.12)

EMBA provided me a chance to know more about the academic world. (p.13)

It is a kind of wastage if one stops at this point (EMBA). After you had already got some ideas about the academic world, why don't you go further? (p.14)

Allan started his learning journey to demonstrate that he was a capable business professional and to gain more trust from his boss. The transformation of Allan's identity is gradually developed. His identity was changed as his friends and boss have noted his determination in learning at his age and has finally finished his degree. Again, his personal changes in dealing with people is a gradual process. He has changed because he was convinced that to get the job done, one has to be more considerate of the others. Allan stated:

I thought one has to try his very best to grab what he wanted. However, now, I understand that we have also sought to keep the relation with others, not to hurt them, not to argue with them. Finally, they would agree with you, they came and supported you.

Allan did not see the values of formal education as he believed what he has learned in the program is not practical. However, he did treasure the exchange with his classmates in different occasions. To him, the most valuable part of the EMBA program is not about instrumental learning; it is the transformative learning which results in the changes in his identity. So, it could answer back to researchers like Mintzberg (2004) and the others why EMBA could charge higher tuition fees even though one may not become a better manager after going through the EMBA training. That is, the value of EMBA should not be measured in the view of corporation, but should also be measured in the view of the learner.

### 5.3 Edward: From Local Manager to General Manager in China

#### 5.3.1 Profile

Before joining the EMBA program, Edward had been a reporter as he was a political science major. After that, he was referred by a friend to become a property manager though he was not quite sure if he liked it or not. Surprisingly, he found the job challenging and interesting as he had to deal with the complaints, feedback, and suggestions from various stakeholders. Before joining the EMBA, Edward has got a master degree in housing study. After the EMBA program, he started a new page of his career, he picked up a new career working in China. He graduated in 2010 with an EMBA degree.

#### 5.3.2 Motivation

In the beginning, Edward wanted to get an MBA degree or a Law degree to enrich his qualification and worked more effectively in my job. However, he was encouraged by his Professor to study executive MBA (EMBA) as he had worked for more than seventeen years already. Edward claimed:

My first preference was MBA, but some of the professors here commented that I had been working for so many years, MBA might not be suitable for me. (p.55)

#### 5.3.3 Expectation

Edward was admitted to two EMBA programs. During the interview, he found one was warm and friendly while the other one was stressful. So, he had decided to take the former one to pursue an academic achievement in management. But, networking had not come into his mind at that time. He claimed:

At that point, what I expected to get was some kind of academic achievement in management. I did not think much about “networking” at that time. (p.56)

#### 5.3.4 Learning Journey

#### *5.3.4.1 Knowledge & Skills Acquired*

Edward mentioned that he had learned a lot about China business. The public speaking exercise was a real challenge to him as he got to present about himself in three minutes. However, he was still ignorant of subjects related to finance and accounting. He said:

One of the subjects I enjoyed was China Business. Another topic I liked was Public Speech. The instructor asked us to tell a story within 3 minutes in front of the class. It was a challenge for me. On the other hand, I did not know what was happening in subjects like Corporate Finance and Accounting. I did not learn much in these areas. (p.57)

#### *5.3.4.2 Personal Transformation*

Edward told us that he would have never gone to work in China if he were not assigned to work on a group consultancy project in Shanghai. His horizon was broadened, and his impression about China had been changed. After returning to Hong Kong, he reexamined his assumptions about the conditions of working in China. He had started to investigate opportunities seriously and finally landed a job in Guangzhou. He mentioned:

It was valuable. It made me look beyond HK. It broadened my insight and changed the perspective in my career path. (p.58)

#### *5.3.4.3 Identity Transformation*

Edward mentioned that he no longer considered himself as a real estate manager as he had to analyze the whole real estate industry and looked into investment opportunities rather than just taking care of daily operations. He is now a consultant or even an investment advisor in real estate development. He did not just look at opportunities in Hong Kong, but the whole of China. He believed:

I am now looking to a more prominent market, and not just about estate management but

the whole real estate industry. Not just in Hong Kong, but in China. (p.58)

### 5.3.5 Learning Environment for Transformation

Edward mentioned that he enjoyed very much learning from Professors and classmates with various backgrounds. These experiences cannot be easily acquired in ones' daily life. He said:

I am enjoying myself in working with professionals who have different backgrounds and experiences. (p.58)

It was a fascinating experience, and you cannot easily get from your daily life. (p.56)

Edward claimed that he was transformed because he had met the other real estate experts from Hong Kong in Shanghai because he had to conduct the consultancy group project. More importantly, he was placed in an environment where he had never been before. With the new experiences encountered in Shanghai, he started to rethink his career. He claimed:

...we did research on Real Estate Management in Shanghai within that week. Moreover, it was beneficial to my career outlook afterwards. Without this experience, I thought I would not take any career chance in China.” (p.57)

### 5.3.6 Overall value of EMBA

Edward treasured his career breakthrough very much after studying the EMBA program. He has had a breakthrough in his career regarding both the region and the role of his responsibility. More importantly, the EMBA has provided him the knowledge and confidence to step into a new career. He concluded:

This program made me break through my limitation; it is my turning point in my career path. (p.58)

I am now looking to a more prominent market, and not just about estate management but the whole real estate industry. Not just in Hong Kong, but in China; not just those tier 1 cities but also tier 2 or 3 cities.

Most importantly, our class representative had given me the confidence to come out and start my own business. (p.58)

As a political science major, Edward needed more knowledge and skills to perform better in his managerial position. Edward did not gain too much in the subjects that he was not familiar with. However, he did like public speaking and China Business. Nevertheless, the EMBA program has changed his whole career as his perspectives have been changed after the consultant trip in China. This triggering event has made him rethink about working in China. As a result, he has taken up a new position in China. His transformative journey was triggered by an event which changed his own perspectives about China and led to new actions. The part related to instrumental learning is not the most valuable part. It is the transformative journey that leads him to a new career that he has never thought of before. Again, Edward's results had also provided insights in measuring the values of EMBA program.

## 5.4 Jan: From IT Naive to IT Manager

### 5.4.1 Profile

Jan was a high school graduate without any degree qualification. She started working for an Australian firm and was trained in Australia. A U.S. University had once accepted Jan but she had to stay back in Hong Kong because Jan failed to get the visa. After that, she switched to a securities firm as a sales director and finally got promoted to become the CEO of the company. After graduating from the EMBA program, she once again transferred to a state owned company and worked as the director over there till now. Jan was graduated with an EMBA degree in 2008.

### 5.4.2 Motivation

The primary reason that motivated Jan to get the degree was getting the academic qualification. Additionally, she wanted to know if there was a gap between what she had been doing and what she would learn from the academic world. She said:

I did not have a college degree. I really wanted to find out if there was any difference between what I knew through working and those taught in academic learning. (p.59)

### 5.4.3 Expectation

Jan's expectation was to acquire new kind of knowledge and to strengthen her social network. She enjoyed mostly listening to the lecture of the Professors. However, she preferred not to present on her own. She said:

I expected to grab some kind of knowledge other than those I learned from my work, and to know more people. I supposed I can just sit down and listen to the professors. (p.59)

### 5.4.4 Learning Journey

#### 5.4.4.1 Knowledge & Skills Acquired

Jan treasured very much the knowledge that she had gained in computer-related subjects. In fact, these knowledge has changed her perspective and understanding about the roles of IT in a company. She was inspired by the Professors and the classmates on how to manage an IT team. She mentioned that to acquire all of these knowledge that she was afraid to touch, all she had to do was to ask. She added:

For me, computer-related subjects were my weaknesses. I faced many problems because senior executives like us seldom had hands on experience. To overcome these kinds of problems, actually, it was straightforward, asking questions and trying hands on. (p.60)

#### 5.4.4.2 Personal Transformation

Jan mentioned that before joining the EMBA program, she made her decision based on intuition and the knowledge acquired on the job training. After completing the EMBA program, she

tackled problems systematically and rationally, and even her boss had noted her changes. She mentioned:

After some observation, he thought I was more rational, more systematic. (p.61)

#### *5.4.4.3 Identity Transformation*

Jan shared that her clients whom she has known for many years had detected that she had changed after the EMBA program. Her clients had more confidence in her decisions as she did not make them based on intuitive feelings. They perceived that she was more reliable and capable because she kept learning even though she had achieved a high position. She claimed:

My clients thought I was studious, and this feeling further made them feel that I was a reliable and capable person. They got the full confidence to work with me. For my colleagues, they respected or even admired me. They thought, I, as their big boss, is still eager to work hard to learn. (p.61)

#### *5.4.4.4 Management Transformation*

Jan had even changed her management or working style. After the EMBA program, she had learned that a thorough analysis had to be conducted before making a decision. Before that, her management style was to get things done as fast as possible. Jan also mentioned:

After the EMBA study, my pace at work was slowed down. Before studying the program, I just wanted to go as quickly as possible. I did not understand that most of the time, what we needed was to slow down and think thoroughly, to observe, to analyze... I would count this as a positive effect on my management style. (p.62)

#### *5.4.5 Learning Environment for Transformation*

Jan particularly mentioned that she enjoyed group project as you had to get to compromise with your teammates with different background and experiences. She learned a lot during the

consultancy trip as she had to get things done within seven days while her team had to collect data, analyze the situation and propose solutions. Jan shared:

Group Project is one of the approaches I like. In individual projects, you go with your ideas. However, in a group project, you had to compromise with your teammates. (p.60)

In our consultancy trip, our team has to conduct research, collect data, and analysis. All these tasks had to be finished within seven days, it was highly useful, and I learned much from it. (p.60)

#### 5.4.6 Overall value of EMBA

Jan treasured very much on what she had achieved after studying the EMBA program. In particular, she mentioned that she had overcome her weakness and had gained the confidence to revamp the IT system in her company with the support of the IT professors.

Additionally, she had even demonstrated to her family members the impact of EMBA program to her life. The EMBA was not just a program, but a life changing journey to her. She concluded:

Before the study, we were always not “brave” enough to put our ideas into practice. However, after the study, we dared to do so. It had a significant impact on my career. (p.61)

After my study in the IT subject in the EMBA program, I revamped the whole IT system in our company. (p.61)

In the beginning, my husband did not support my decision. However, after some time, he felt my changes. Finally, my little girl was proud to say that, “we all have degrees in our family!” (p.62)

It has benefited my whole life. It changed my life. (p.62)

Jan initially just wanted to get an academy qualification and wanted to know if there was any differences between the practices in the real world and the academic world. Nevertheless, she was transformed because of the IT knowledge and skills that she had never encountered before.



With the support from an EMBA professor, she was confident to revamp the whole IT system in her company. Jan's learning journey was quite rational and gradual as she gained her confidence in IT after a series of IT training. It appears that her transformation has gone through three phases (i) dilemma orientation as she admitted that she was not capable in handling IT issues as a financial professional (ii) she has reflected on the IT knowledge and skills and consequently built up her confidence and (iii) finally she has taken the action in revamping the whole IT system.

However, what she also has treasured is not just the IT knowledge, she treasured very much that the EMBA program had built up her confidence in changing her corporation. Additionally, she has finally changed her relationship with her family members as she has demonstrated the life impact of EMBA program to her.

## 5.5 Doris: From high school principal to NGO consultant

### 5.5.1 Profile

Doris had worked in different positions in high schools for her whole life. She had started working as a teacher and had been promoted to become the principal of a high school. She had stopped working for a couple of years as her husband had passed away. After that, she was invited to become the principal of another high school. Now, she is working as a consultant of a NGO. She joined the EMBA program at 2010 and graduated two years later.

### 5.5.2 Motivation

As a principal, she was well-trained professionally. However, she was lacking of knowledge and skills in management. She did study but did not complete the Doctor of Education program at a local University. As she found the courses in administration and management quite useful, she decided to join the EMBA program to enhance her management skills further. She explained:

I always thought I got the professional skills, but lack of management skills. (p.63)

I recognized that it was not an easy task to manage the school especially when I became the principal of the new secondary school. (p.63)

### 5.5.3 Expectations

Doris claimed that she did not know too much about financial planning, budgeting, managing junior staff and office administrations. However, the assistant headmaster who worked for her had successfully managed all the theses task effectively. Therefore, she believed that she should enrich her management skills and handle the school using a more efficient approach. At the same time, Doris wanted to gain some new ideas to stimulate herself. That was why she had joined the EMBA instead of programs related to education administration. She stated:

I did not know how to manage money, junior staff, and the office... (p.63)

My school supervisor employed a retired headmaster to share my duty. She picked up all the office management and administration works, which, I recognized later, should be under the category of “operation management.” (p.63)

### 5.5.4 Learning Journey

#### 5.5.4.1 *Knowledge & Skills Acquired*

Doris claimed that she learned a lot in the operation management for two reasons. First of all, the Professor did use an experiential learning approach to deliver the classes. More importantly, she could readily apply what she learned in her work environment.

However, she had a hard time understanding financial management and could not even memorize the technical terms. Doris got a hard time understanding negotiation techniques as there was not much she had to negotiate in a high school. The salaries of everyone were decided based on the policy of the government. Doris said:

My challenges were on those subjects that I didn't have much knowledge in the areas; like corporate finances. I really didn't get much about that. (p.63)

#### *5.5.4.2 Personal Transformation*

Doris told us that she had changed her perception at the business people. During the EMBA study, she had encountered many people in businessess who had different perspectives on management, different values on life and behaved quite differently. Though she might not be one of them, Doris now understood their behavior and values much more than before. Now she had a different perception on how and why business people build relationship and team up with the others. She recalled:

During the study, I knew many business people. Then, I knew their ways of seeing things, and how they make decisions. This changed my way to look at these kinds of people. (p.65)

#### *5.5.4.3 Identity Transformation*

Prior to joining the EMBA program, she thought she was an education professional, but now she could be an advisor or even a consultant after acquiring all the EMBA coursework. Even though she did not tell her boss about her study, her boss did detect that she had changed.

Now, I know how to operate my school, how to monitor the finance and account matter. (p.66)

I didn't talk with my boss about my study. But, when my boss look at the change of the school that I managed, he knew the difference. (p.66)

#### *5.5.4.4 Management Transformation*

In the past, Doris did not know too much about management and ran her school based on her intuition. She did not even know where and how to get the skills and knowledge. However, now, she knows how to use a different view to look at management. She did understand how

to explain professionally to the board of directors in business terms. She can understand the mind of the directors and is more willing to adapt to their ideas.

#### 5.5.5 Learning Environment for Transformation

Doris emphasized that pedagogy was the most crucial part of the program. The value of the program is to learn from the classmates. So, pedagogy such as group work, activities-based learning, and case discussion that can stimulate sharing and debate must be used. Otherwise, the program would not be worth such a high tuition fees. She asserted:

An EMBA program wasn't worth several hundred thousands of dollars if it was just a program mainly delivered through lectures. If the EMBA program didn't put in elements like experiential learning, constructivism, and interaction among the group into the program, it would not worth that much money. (p.64)

#### 5.5.6 Overall value of EMBA

She lost her job during her study as she did not have time to handle the crisis in her high school. However, now she could say confidently that she knew how to operate a school. She is now applying her management skills and other administration skills in her daily operations. She can even handle issues related to accounting and finance. She concluded:

Her life value and practice had not be changed, but her working style had.

Doris wanted to get business knowledge and skills to handle the administration duties as a high school principal. She treasured very much on experiential learning. She also believed that pedagogy played an important role in changing their working style. This echoed what Cranton has claimed. Cranton believed that individual learning style is key factor in transformative learning.

Overall, Doris claimed that she has not changed her values. In other words, her own belief and assumptions may not have been changed after all the experiences encountered in the EMBA

program. However, she did mention that her perspectives on businessmen have been changed and her administration has been changed. So, among all the interviewees, her transformation is the least, and the values that she gained are not as much as the others. It is quite likely that her learning style does not fit the EMBA program or vice versa. However, it does point out the importance of learning style and pedagogy in transformative learning.

## 5.6 Mary: From Senior Manager to Unit Head

### 5.6.1 Profile

Mary has been in the IT related areas for many years. She started as an IT engineer in Singapore and worked there for two years. Upon returning to Hong Kong, she worked as a data warehouse consultant and finally landed as senior data manager in a major bank in Hong Kong. While she is working, she joined the EMBA program. Now, she is a Unit head leading more than thirty staff in Hong Kong, China, and Malaysia. She got her undergraduate degree in IT and graduated in 2012 with an EMBA degree in the same University.

### 5.6.2 Motivation

Mary had a strong technical background but lacked business knowledge. However, there are more than 30 subordinates working under her supervision. When she first enrolled on the EMBA program, she was at a cross roads. She believed that she needed some kind of recognition in the business areas to advance her career. She recalled:

At that moment, I was at a life junction. I was looking for some programs to improve myself

I was thinking about getting some recognition in the field of business; also, I wanted to expand my network.

### 5.6.3 Expectations

The expectations of Mary were quite straightforward. She just wanted to expand her social

network and earn a recognized business degree.

#### 5.6.4 Learning Journey

##### 5.6.4.1 Knowledge & Skills Acquired

Mary did not mention too much about what knowledge and skills were acquired. However, she was very impressed by the pedagogy used by the Professors. She claimed:

It really opened up my learning experiences. For example, using the classical Chinese literature to teach marketing, the consultant (residential) trip, and the visit to UC Berkeley.

##### 5.6.4.2 Personal Transformation

Mary mentioned that she became more positive and this attitude had even affected how she took care of her son. She said:

The program, personally, changed my attributes. I became more positive thinking, even to my son. I am not as harsh as before; I learned that sometimes, you should let go. Most likely I was influenced by my partners, by their way of working.

##### 5.6.4.3 Management Transformation

Mary did not push their subordinates too hard as she had only the engineering background without too much management sense. However, after the EMBA program, she believed that it was her responsibility to manage the team to complete the tasks in time. She admitted:

To my subordinates, I may be even harsher than before. Because now, I know what I have to achieve. I have to push them to complete the tasks.

#### 5.6.5 Learning Environment for Transformation

Mary appreciated meeting all the learning partners (classmates) with different backgrounds, beliefs and even working styles. She found that she had changed due to the influence of the learning partners.

She admitted that group projects were always valuable. However, the challenge was how to deal with the strong characters of the teammates. She was comfortable and proud to be a facilitator for group discussion. She claimed:

The challenge always come from human factors. The partners have strong characters and have their own preferences

My role was always a facilitator; I tried to calm down others' emotions and got the work done.

Mary also treasured the pedagogy that she had encountered in a prestigious University in US. She said:

In UC Berkeley, their rhythm impacted me. It was really effective to limit sessions to about 40 to 50 minutes.

#### 5.6.6 Overall value of EMBA

Mary believed that the EMBA learning journey was valuable. In fact, it has created life impact to her life. She told me that she had encountered a lot of new experiences through the connections of the learning partners. However, she did not mention about the knowledge or skills that she found valuable.

It is worthy it! I learned a lot from my partners. It was one of the most wonderful experiences in my life.

After we left Berkeley, we took the private Jet trip to our learning partner's wedding party. It was really a valuable experience.

Mary's motivation was quite typical as she just wanted to get a degree and know more people. So, she did not have too much expectation. However, she treasured very much the interactions with her classmates especially the gatherings outside the classroom. Some events such as taking

a private jet to one of her classmates was quite an experience to her. However, in her working environment, she has been transformed as she has become a professional who is more conscious about the deadline instead of just focusing on keeping good relationships of her subordinates. She changed from an engineer to a business professional.

Mary's transformation was gradual as she was transformed after a long time encountering different management styles of her classmates. To a certain extent, her transformation is quite rational. Even though she did not mention she has done a self-reflection on the experiences she encountered, she did admit that she was changed after investigating the experiences of her classmates. And finally, she has decided to change her management style. So, her transformation has actually followed the essential phrases that Mezirow has proposed.

## 5.7 Summary

The six interviewees in this Chapter share common characteristics. They were senior executives when first enrolled into the EMBA program and have not transformed into entrepreneurs to set up their own business. Their motivations are quite typical. For non-degree holders, they just want to get an academic qualification. For degree holder, they just would like to acquire some knowledge and skills to perform their work better. However, unlike the entrepreneurs, they were not quite ready to change.

Throughout the EMBA program, they all have acquired new skill and knowledge. However, the outcomes are different depending on authority. In fact, they were not ready. Jan has revamped the whole system as she had the authority to head the whole company. Tommy has transformed his perspectives, however, he could not take action until he had transferred to another company. Allan has changed his identity as he was being recognized by a group of business leaders as the most valuable player. Edward has transformed his career due to a visit in China. Doris claimed that her values have not been changed, but her behavior has been changed. Mary has changed her management style.

In terms of their transformative process, it appears that they have gone through it in a more



rational gradual manner. In fact, this resembles what Mezirow has proposed. Interviewees were in the state that they did not know how to breakthrough themselves in their life and looked for solutions. They had to reexamine their assumptions and values when they encountered the business leaders who had different opinions on different business issues. New knowledge and skills were acquired through formal and informal environment. Some might even have applied what they had learned. As a result, they had changed or built up new perspectives. However, the outcomes are more than changing the perspectives or changing the habits of mind. Additionally, they have also encountered triggering events that cause them to change their perspectives, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6. Findings and Discussion (Cross Case Analysis)

In the last Chapter, I have written the summary of each individual interview and have highlighted the main points. In this Chapter, using the 12 interviewees' transcripts, I will discuss the codes and themes identified using the thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clark (2012). With this approach, I have identified the common values and transformed outcomes shared by interviewees. More importantly, I have identified the conditions that facilitate and block the transformative learning process. Finally, I will discuss how the personal issues block them to gain the values of the EMBA program (Figure 2).

### 6.1 Values of EMBA

#### 6.1.1 A Comparison with Past Research

Based on the thematic analysis, twelve basic themes related to the values and meanings of the EMBA program are identified. These twelve themes can further be classified into two groups (Table 8, Table 9). While six of them can be considered as the source for the learners to prepare in future, the other six are related to their personal transformation.

Table 8 The Values and Meaning of the EMBA

EMBA as a Source to Prepare Learner's Future	EMBA as a Source of Transformation
1. Source of Opportunities	7. New Perspective
2. New Knowledge & Skills	8. New Habit of Thinking
3. Business Intelligence	9. Personal Development
4. Career Transformation/Development	10. New Identity
5. Facing New Challenge	11. Relationship with the Others
6. Life Impact	12. New Management Style

The six transformative themes are consistent with other research results. In particular the first three themes namely, new perspective, new habit of thinking and new identity have been mentioned by many other researchers in the areas of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000; Cranton, 1994a; Boyd, 1991; Illeris 2014). The other transformation related

themes, namely, new management style, personal development by researchers in the area of executive or business education. Long (2004) has argued that MBA programs may not help to improve the organization, but they do improve the personal development of the students. Hodgkinson (2008) claimed that MBA programs can improve the self-confidence of students. As Chia and Holt (2008) mentioned, an EMBA program can build up a new identity for a student. Hilgert (1995, 1996) has argued how EMBA can create impact on the personal development of students.

The themes related to preparing the learners' future are also consistent with some other research work. For instance, Currie & Knights (2003) has mentioned that some students focus on career development and do not care if transformation has occurred on them. Chen & Doherty (2012, 2013) also mentioned that EMBA students would just look for business opportunities through the EMBA programs.

#### 6.1.2 New Insights Gained

Nevertheless, this research has gained more in depth insights into each theme. For instance, interviewees consider that EMBA program is more than just a source for career advancement when they said that EMBA was a source of opportunities. It has been a source that can motivate them to capture new opportunities as the other students can act as their mentors when they are involved in areas to which they have never had exposure. In the following sections, I will discuss each theme in more detail.

#### 6.1.3 EMBA as a Source to Prepare Learner's Future

In this section, I will discuss the six themes that prepare the EMBA learners to prepare the future. The first three themes are related to source of opportunities, gaining knowledge and skills, and business intelligence. The other three themes related to the development of the learners including career development, facing new challenges and the life impact (Table 8)

#### *6.1.3.1 Source of Opportunities*

Interviewees have mentioned that the EMBA program is a source of opportunities. Some mentioned that it was a source of knowledge and skills. However, more importantly, this source provided the latest knowledge and skills that one could not get in public resources. People could get more in-depth business and industry knowledge from their classmates as there were not too many conflicts of interest in a learning environment. They may even gain business intelligence through the EMBA program. Also, they had worked together on different projects and knew well if their classmates were trustworthy. As Angel mentioned:

It is a source where you can identify business opportunities that one has never been exposed to. It provides the know-how through the advice from the classmates who are experts in the industries. Consequently, one can penetrate a market like an expert.

James shared:

When you came across some real world problems, you could discuss with Professors and learning Partners. I came with my own problems and questions to every lesson, and I gained solutions. (p.16)

The EMBA learners could pick up the latest knowledge and information about the new business environment. As such, new business ideas can be identified by understanding the new needs of the customers. At the same time, partnership among classmates can be formed to create synergy. New types of business can even be formed. So it is also a source of career development and advancement. In fact, the classmates and professors can serve as their lifelong learning partners whenever they have encountered business or even life problems. So, EMBA can be considered as a source to prepare one's future.

In this research, it is found that the EMBA program is much more than "knowing who", it is a lifelong trustworthy relationship that can impact their business and personal development.

#### *6.1.3.2 New Knowledge & Skills*

Based on the themes developed, all the interviewees agreed that they have acquired new knowledge and skills. However, the values of new knowledge and skills acquired in EMBA vary depending on the experiences of the interviewees.

First, it depends on the learning experience and the expertise of the interviewees. For instance, many interviewees found the subjects related to finance were not valuable as they did not have adequate understanding of these topics. For example, Edward found the course “China Business” useful as he used to major in political science but he did not see a lot benefit from corporate finance. Secondly, it depends on the working experiences of the interviewees, Jan found that the subject related to information management was most useful as she was assigned to conduct an information system conversion project. This project had provided her an opportunity to breakthrough herself as she used to be a finance expert. Thirdly, it also depends whether the interviewees can apply what they have learned immediately. Tommy used the frameworks learned to design his training course and had outperformed the other training consultants. James applied the negotiation skills immediately and had solved his business issues. However, Allan complained that strategy management was not realistic and could not be implemented in his own working environment. On the other hand, Tommy mentioned that he was stunned by the new knowledge and skills and consequently applied those skills and knowledge after he was employed by another company after he graduated.

The learning and working experiences directly impacted on interviewees’ perceived values of the EMBA program. The opportunity of applying the knowledge and skills is also a critical factor as interviewees can only perceive the values based on their own belief if they can apply what they have learned.

The values of knowledge and skills may vary significantly due to the past working and learning experiences, their learning styles, and whether the learners have the authority to apply what they have learned. Nevertheless, EMBA is a source of information, intelligence, and knowledge that one may not get in the textbooks or other social circles.

While “knowing-what” has been mentioned as a key motivator of the students, the impact of those skills and knowledge may vary. In particular, it is found for those who have the opportunities and authority to apply what they have learned can benefit more. In fact, transformative learning occurs when one can see the effect of the new skills and knowledge.

#### *6.1.3.3 Business Intelligence*

Interviewees have frequently talked about the interaction of diversified talents from different industries. What they find is that the classmates or learning partners are sources of getting the most updated information in the business world. However, this partnership relationship is entirely different from the social network outside the EMBA program. Classmates could be more trustworthy as there are no conflicts of interest and they have studied together for a long time. Angel claimed:

Luckily, we came from various industries. We didn't have any conflicts of interest.

Additionally, the relationships developed are stronger as they have gone through many team project assignments, which require them to work very closely. They have a good understanding of the characters and capacity of different classmates. In other words, they know who they have to contact in order to gain the intelligence that they want. So, EMBA is not just a source of opportunities, but also a source of business intelligence as the EMBA students of the same cohorts are selected from different industries.

In this research, it is found that a significant value of EMBA is exchanging of business intelligence as they cannot get it outside the arena of EMBA. In fact, this value appears not been mentioned in other studies. To make it happen, a trustworthy learning network must be first built.

#### *6.1.3.4 Career Transformation/Development*

As mentioned, EMBA is a source of career development and advancement; many interviewees have changed their careers after the EMBA programs for various reasons. First, they found new opportunities among their classmates and professors. Secondly, they wanted to have a new page of their career and apply what they have learned in different areas. Thirdly, they are more confident on what they want to do as now they have a group of mentors (classmates and professors) to help them out in case they encounter any difficulties. Harry has started his own retail chain stores while he used to be a real estate developer. He wanted to apply what he has learned from the EMBA program. Angel has been transformed from a senior executive to a consultant as she wants to help out more small and medium enterprises to develop their business through applying what she has learned and experienced.

While some of the interviewees considered changing their career before joining the EMBA program, they were lacking of confidence to do so. They were not sure if they were well equipped to enter a new area that they were not familiar. They believed that EMBA program had indeed equipped them. More importantly, they then had a group of mentors that were experts in the areas that could support them to pursue what they wanted. The EMBA program became their life long source of knowledge and skills that support their career and business development. The EMBA built up the learners' confidence to transform their career.

#### *6.1.3.5 Facing New Challenges*

The values of EMBA may not be seen immediately as some executives may not have a chance to apply what they have learned. Some of them may not have picked up a career or position right after their graduation. However, they also mention that they feel more confident in facing new challenges. Katie mentioned:

EMBA broadened your vision. You dare to face bigger challenges. (p24)

Tommy has also mentioned that the EMBA program does not only help him to face the challenges at work, but also life challenges. He claimed that:

Whenever facing new challenges, I got more confidence. (p6)

In summary, the EMBA program is source of opportunities which serves as (i) a source of latest skills and knowledge (ii) a source of career development and advancement and (iii) a source that they can make use to face future challenges.

In this research, it is found that students have more confidence and willingness to face the new challenge and are ready to change after completing the EMBA program. This may also consider as a kind of transformative learning as it shows that their values on changing may have been changed too. Additionally, they have expounded their horizon and are ready to face life challenges.

#### *6.1.3.6 Life Impact*

Majority of interviewees mentioned that the overall learning experience of EMBA has life impact on them. They used different emotional words such as “enjoyable”, “memorable”, “interesting” and “definitely worthy”, “valuable” and “self-fulfillment” to describe their learning experiences. Even though they may not have specifically point out what have caused them to think in this way, they did express how they were emotionally touched by some incidents or events. For instance, many of them did talk about how they helped each other out during the residential trip, which required them to finish an unstructured consultancy work within ten days in China. Katie mentioned:

I still remembered that, you brought Doris and me to the church, during the r-trip. It is my first time going to church

Mary recalled:

After we left Berkeley, we took the private Jet trip to our learning partner’s wedding party.

There are events that have touched their hearts even though they are not directly related to



academic learning. They treasured very much the relationship and friendship that they had gain in the learning journey.

As mentioned before, the EMBA learning journey has provided transformative experiences. To the learners, the most important part is something that impacts on their life. While they have never mentioned that they had expected that the EMBA program could create life impact on them, 9 out of 12 interviewees talked about life impact. In fact, the impact can occur both inside and outside the classrooms. It is just like what Tisdell (2012) has claimed. Transformative learning can occur emotionally, rationally and even spiritually.

In this research, it was identified that even though students may not expect to gain life impact in the EMBA program, it has significant impact on their life. It is also noted that this kind of transformative learning occurs when they are in need of support from each other. For instance, when they were on trips, but still needed to deal with group projects. So, both inside and outside classroom activities can contribute to transformative learning.

#### 6.1.4 EMBA as a Source of Transformation

While there are six themes that are related to the outcomes of transformative learning, four of them are related to the personal transformation of the learners internally while the other two are related to the other people. First, I will talk about the learner's personal transformation first followed by the learners' relationship to the others.

##### 6.1.4.1 *New Perspectives*

Interviewees expressed that they have expected to learn something new as they wanted something to stimulate their thinking and gain new business insights even though they did not mention that they wanted to have new perspectives.

Mezirow (1978a) argued that transformation starts with the new experiences encountered. During the interviews, interviewees mentioned that the primary source to encounter new

experiences is to interact with other students and Professors. Another source is the trips especially the consultant based trips. From these two sources, learners' encounters are stimulated to reexamine their assumptions, values, and belief. As a result, they have changed their perspectives.

For instance, Tommy was stunned when he first noted that most of the classmates had implemented a management concept that he did not believe existed. After the EMBA program, he ended up working with a company applying the management concept he did not embrace before.

James has also mentioned he was shocked when learning how Chinese ethics can be applied in developing brands in marketing. Consequently, a new perspective about marketing was developed.

Mary believed that her job as a technical person is to provide technical expertise only. However, after the interaction with her learning partners, she understood that she should be responsible for the progress of the project as she was a team leader.

Because I know what I have to achieve, I have to push them to complete the tasks.  
Most likely, I was influenced by my partners (classmates), by their way of working.(p69)

There is no doubt that EMBA students have changed their perspectives on management. In this research, it is found that the EMBA program has also brought in new experiences that have impacted on their professional and personal life.

#### *6.1.4.2 New Habit of Thinking*

Many interviewees mentioned that they would expect to learn a more systematic or structured approach to analyze business issues. After the EMBA program, they found their approaches in solving problems were more systematic when compared with their past performance. Angel mentioned that most of the local business owners did not have a framework to make a proper decision. However, the EMBA program had equipped them to use frameworks learned from

the EMBA program to analyze and solve problems systematically. In fact, the EMBA program has changed their habit of thinking. Angel said:

I found that in Hong Kong, most of entrepreneurs did not have a proper framework to set up their business. They got many ideas. However, since they did not have a proper framework, they faced much difficulty when they were trying to execute their ideas. (p37)

Tommy also mentioned:

I found that we could analyze and understand things by some “frameworks.” It was really beneficial for me. (p 7)

Just like what Angel mentioned, most of the interviewees who were business owners did not have systematic and structured approach to analyze a problem.

In this research, it is found that the EMBA program has bought them the frameworks (tools), which have altered their way of thinking. Moreover, they now can communicate better with the others; it is more systematic as it utilizes new tools that provide a new platform: a new habit of thinking.

#### *6.1.4.3 Personal Development*

While not every interviewee has expressed their personal development in the EMBA learning journey, they all concluded that it is a journey with lifelong impact. Katie has become more considerate to her workers as well as to the others. Christy mentioned that she has a new perspective in failure and success. Harry mentioned that he has been converted to be a more open boss. He can now conduct public speaking comfortably. Allan has become a mentor to his young classmates as he has learned how to deal with youngsters.

In summary, the EMBA program has impact on the personal development of interviewees. Though this may not be an intended income of most EMBA programs, interviewees considered that attributed to the values of the EMBA program.

In this research, it has also been noted that students have improved not just their business skills

and knowledge, the EMBA program has helped them to improve personal skills such as team building, public communication and project management even though they have been well equipped with these skills before.

#### *6.1.4.4 New Identity*

Many interviewees mentioned they became more confident after graduation as they knew people would respect him/her becoming better professionals. Or, they will be perceived that they can well manage the companies through the business knowledge or skills that they have acquired in the EMBA program. Their right business decisions are considered as professional decisions, because their decisions are made based on frameworks or models. With the well-equipped training in business, they felt that they could handle their work effectively. This is the identity change internally. More importantly, they felt that their boss, subordinates, and even vendors will trust them more in terms of business decisions. So, both internally and externally, they feel now that they have a new identity. As Allan mentioned, he has proved to his boss that he is a capable person and all his success do not depend on luck. The identity of Allan has been changed as they are now considered as business professionals. As Christy claimed:

Most of my clients trusted me. They respected me, especially after I finished my EMBA. Even my family respected me as well. Especially my cousins, because I always helped them to solve their problems.

But more importantly, some of them have become role models of their family members. Both Bob and Allan have become the role models of learning to their family members.

In this research, it shows that the transformative learning experiences of the students can affect the closely related family members and friends. These people may also be transformed when they have witnessed the transformation of the role model.

#### *6.1.4.5 Relationships with the others*

Out of the twelve interviewees, eleven mentioned that they have changed their management style and consequently change their relationships with their subordinates. Their relationships become less hierarchy with the subordinates after they have graduated from the EMBA program. Many of them have further empowered their employees as their trust level has become higher. Externally, even their relationships with their vendors have earned trust as they are now recognized or proven as management professionals. Many of them have become role models for their colleagues as they have witnessed how the interviewees had gone through their learning challenges despite the fact that they already had high social status and are financially adequate.

Some even mentioned that their relationships with their families have been changed. For instance, James said that his family status has been changed. His wife and siblings were proud of his academic achievement although he has been a successful business owner for so many years. Some have attributed the learning actions to have influenced the attitudes and behavior of their family members on learning. Due to the busy schedule of the interviewees, some have to sacrifice their family time. However, a couple of them have opened their houses for group project discussions. As a result, their family members treasured the family much more, and their family relationships have become closer.

The past research work (Long 2004) has mentioned how an EMBA learner has changed his relationship with people in the work environment. In this research, it is identified that the learners can also influence their family members and close friends. This phenomenon has seldom been mentioned in other research work. In fact, interviewees are proud that their transformation can positively influence their family members.

#### *6.1.4.6 Management Style*

Almost all interviewees mentioned that they had changed their management style after the EMBA program. The interviewees had claimed that their motivation and confidence were

stronger after the program as they had witnessed how others did use different approaches to manage their business.

The management philosophies of the interviewees had been challenged under different situations. They were challenged subtly when Professors threw out questions openly for discussion because they found answers which were so different from their own beliefs and/or perspectives. Tommy admitted that he was stunned when he noted that so many classmates were implementing the matrix system in their companies.

Interviewees changed the way they treated their subordinates as they found that there were alternatives approaches to manage their employees. Some changes were implemented due to the continual teaching from the Professors. She mentioned that she had changed from a dictator to a more considerate boss. Katie claimed that she had changed from a “hands on” boss to a “hands off” boss. In other words, Katie is much more willing to delegate her work to her subordinates. Harry was confident with his subordinates. He believed that they could make their own decisions and were more capable than he had once believed. As Katie said:

My partner has observed my transformation in management style; from “everything-hands-on” to “everything-hands-off” and with full confidence. (p 25)

This research has found out that the management style can be changed as they have reexamine the values of their subordinates, or they have changed their perception on their workers and have seen management from a new perspectives due to the encounter of different management styles.

Table 9 Summary of Outcomes through the EMBA Program of each interviewee

	James	Katie	Harry	Bob	Christy	Angel	Tommy	Allan	Edward	Jan	Doris	Mary
1. Source of Opportunity	X	X					X					
2. Career Development						X	X		X		X	
3. Management Style	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
4. New Perspectives	X	X					X		X			
5. New Habit of Thinking	X	X										
6. Personal Development	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. Face the new challenge	X		X				X		X			
8. Business Intelligence	X	X	X						X			
9. New Knowledge & Skill	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10. Relationship with others	X	X						X				
11. New Identity	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
12. Life Impact	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X

## 6.2 Challenges to Learning

In the previous subsections, twelve themes related to the values and meanings of the EMBA program have been discussed. In this section, the five basic themes related to the challenges (blockages) that block the learners (Table 10) in gaining the values of EMBA program are discussed.

Table 10. Challenges (Blockages) to Learning

Challenges (Blockages) to Learning
1. Unfamiliar subject matters
2. Compromise in Teams
3. Cost of the Program
4. Class schedule and location
5. Balance of life commitment

### 6.2.1 Unfamiliar Subject Matters

Some interviewees mentioned that they were very fond of some topics such as marketing and public speaking. They were impacted by the content of various topics. However, there were topics such as corporate finance that they still did not understand what was going on. The values of each subject depends on the background and expertize of the interviewees. Edward mentioned:

The subject I enjoyed was China Business that was taught by Dr. Song. On the other hand, I really didn't know what was happening in subjects like Corporate Finance and Accounting. Actually, I didn't know much in these areas. (p 57)

Just like Edward, some interviewees have no ideas about some subjects after studying it. Doris also mentioned:

My challenges were on those subjects that I didn't have much knowledge in the areas; like



corporate finances. I did not get much from that. I had difficulty not just in learning, but even to memorize those terms. To overcome this challenge, I had tutorial with the professors and classmates.

However, Doris had overcome the challenge through tutorial. On the other hand, Jan has overcome the challenges of studying management information system (MIS), a subject that she had no prior formal training before. However, she was determined to revamp the information system of her company. She said:

After my study in the IT subject in the EMBA program, I revamped the whole IT system in our company.

In summary, this research has found that the attitude towards how to deal with difficult or unfamiliar subjects will affect whether the students can gain values of the EMBA program. Students who can overcome the challenge like Jan can expand their horizon and apply what they have learned. Otherwise, students may not get the best values of the EMBA program.

### 6.2.2 Compromise in Teams

All interviewees have mentioned that one of the most important critical success factors of an EMBA program is the interactions with other participants (learning partners). Bob and Angel both mentioned that they would have learned much more if students are more willing to team up with different people instead of sticking with the same group members all the time. However, different interviewees have also pointed out that the group project activities may be all in vain if team members are not willing to compromise and come up with a consensus. Disagreement among team members always hurts the learning morale and even their relationship.

Interviewees have used different approaches to solve this issue. Some act as peacemaker and try to come up with a commonly accepted solution. Some just keep silent to avoid provoking the fight among team members. Allan used to play a leading role to settle the disagreement. He believed that team members respected him because of his age and working experiences.

This research shows that team management is a critical factor that determines how much EMBA

students can achieve in an EMBA program. Leadership and the art of compromising are both critical in dealing with this issue. Uncompromised team member(s) may affect the learning atmosphere and in turn blocking the sharing of insights and ideas among team members that ultimately blocks the process of transformative learning.

### 6.2.3 Cost of the Program

Angel has frankly mentioned that she chose her EMBA program because it was affordable. Tommy mentioned he had compared the tuition with the cost of buying a Camry. Finally, he had decided to join the EMBA program to upgrade his “brain” rather than getting a car. Doris had to choose between joining the Doctor of Education (EdD) program or the EMBA program. Finally, she had decided to take the EMBA program, which was affordable to her. In other words, cost was one of the considerations when choosing an appropriate program. Or, the costing of an EMBA program could affect the choice of a student. Students might have to consider enrolled into a second choice program due to the high cost of the EMBA program.

### 6.2.4 Class Schedule and Location

The class schedule and the location have also been factors affecting the decision of students in selecting an EMBA program. Bob mentioned that location was a critical factor for him in choosing an EMBA program as he had to travel quite frequently between Hong Kong and China. Moreover, the University he had chosen was right next to the train station. Tommy had mentioned that he got to ensure the schedule did not conflict with his family commitment and his work commitment. Tommy recalled:

As a manager, I always need to work or to join social activities until midnight. It was really a significant challenge to decide whether going to sleep or opening the book to have some reading when you returned home after midnight (p. 6).

It was important that the EMBA schedule did not conflict with the work commitment. As a senior executive or an entrepreneur, one has to travel frequently. In particular, for those who

have business in China and ASEAN countries, they believed the close monitoring is necessary. All students are busy people. As Katie said:

The most prominent challenge was time management; How to deal with her busy and travelling schedule (.

#### 6.2.5 Balance of Life Commitments

The balance of work life is always an issue to the interviewees. Tommy has mentioned the challenge of pursuing an EMBA degree was that he was going through crisis in his career and family. So, the prioritization of different commitment has become a significant issue in gaining the best values of an EMBA program. Tommy recalled:

When I was studying the program, my son was only one year old; I had to take care of the family and household stuff. My wife was suffering a lot, but I couldn't help much. (p.5)

The biggest challenge was time management. It was tough to squeeze out some time from the working schedule. I remembered that we had to read the text book as well as some reference books every month for every subject, it was almost impossible for me. (p.3)

Based on the data collected, time management is a critical issue that affects the amount of value a student can gain through the EMBA program. It depends very much on the working and academic background of the students. As the EMBA students had been out of school for many years, it took them quite some effort to fit into the academic environment. More importantly, they have to balance their family and working life. In this research, it has been identified that prioritization and scheduling are key challenges for EMBA students to gain the best from the program.

In summary, this research has identified that the values that an EMBA student gained will be determined by how well they can handle the issues mentioned. To gain the best values of an EMBA program, students must commit and find alternatives to handle the issues. For instance, Tommy has used his savings to pay for the tuition instead of buying a Camry. Some interviewees mentioned that they open their own house for group project discussion so that they can spend more time staying home. Therefore, for those who had adapted their life style and

were ready to change for getting the best values of the EMBA program, they would have a better chance to get the most values from the EMBA program.

### 6.3 Facilitation to Learning

In the last subsection, I discussed about the learning challenges. In this section, I will discuss what learning conditions can facilitate learners to gain the values of the EMBA program. Six major themes that facilitate learning have been identified will be discussed in this section (Table 11).

Table 11 Facilitation to Learning

<b>Facilitation to Learning</b>
1. Learner as Facilitator & Peacemaker
2. Friendly Learning Atmosphere
3. Team members with Positive Learning Attitude
4. Diversified Pedagogy
5. Honest and Trustworthy Interaction
6. Close Relationship with Professors

#### 6.3.1 Learner as Facilitator & Peacemaker

It is often mentioned by the interviewees that the interactions with the classmates are quite enlightening. Everyone found the interactions with Professors and classmates valuable and impactful to their work as well as their life. However, to get the best value out of the interactions, one may have to sacrifice or compromise with the others. One has to know when to play a leading role or a team supporting role. Allan mentioned that he could play the lead as he was the most experienced and had gained respect from the others.

The mood of the team also would affect the group project discussion and in turn, affect the

learning quality. To gain the best out of the EMBA program, students have to know how to facilitate team communication. This research found out that team management facilitates communication, and this is actually a critical successful factor for getting the best values of the EMBA program.

### 6.3.2 Friendly Learning atmosphere

The interviewees had also mentioned that Professors could create a learning atmosphere that could affect the effectiveness of learning and transformation. They believed that the caring and friendly relationships between Professors and students had created a learning atmosphere that foster transformation. They could feel free to ask questions, argue with the Professors and had even hot debate among the students in the class. Professors had been using different approaches to demonstrate how approachable they are. For instance, a marketing Professor did lead the students to sing in the class to explain a marketing concept. On the other hand, James mentioned that students may also have to know when to stop the hot debate and arguments. He recalled:

Sometimes, we got into serious arguments, especially during those residential trips. We needed to adapt, to adjust one self. Just like when we first came out to work in the society, every time we started again. (p18)

This research shows that an open and friendly discussion atmosphere contribute significantly to transformative learning as students will tend to be more willing to share their true feelings and opinions. This is important for students to exchange and expose to new ideas.

### 6.3.3 Team Members with Positive Learning Attitude

Learning attitude contributed significantly to the success of acquiring the best values of the EMBA program. Tommy said:

If we all were in high spirit and good attitudes, group projects were good. However, sometimes, when the team members were busy, the situations were terrible. (p 5)

As group project is an important vehicle to learn from the other classmates and professors, the team spirit can directly affect the learning atmosphere. So, teammates have to take turn to play different roles and are willing to comprise. In fact, as mentioned by Mary, the emotion of teammates must be settled. Otherwise, the progress of the project will be blocked. Mary found that a teammate with the characters of peacemaker or good facilitator is essential to keep the group project going.

In this research, it has been identified that group project with good learning attitude is a critical factor that motivates student to exchange on different business issues. However, one must also note that group project can also lead to failure of transformative learning if people do not have an open mind or lack of enthusiasm to work on the project assignment. This reflects the importance of a good learning attitude as the critical underlying principle.

#### 6.3.4 Honest and Trustworthy Interaction

All interviewees consider the interactions with other students as precious. It may be perceived that the primary objective of students in joining the EMBA program is to build network. Many articles have also mentioned that “knowing-who” is one of the most important motivation for students to enroll the EMBA program. However, a couple of interviewees have denied this. Allan honestly said that he did not want to build social networks. Others have also mentioned that the EMBA learning journey has provided them much more than a social network.

The major reason is that students have to go through close interaction, working on various projects together, and facing the learning challenges together. As mentioned before, a few interviewees have to ask family members to support them to discuss group projects at home. Their assumptions and values had been challenged by each other. Through the project work, they gain new perspectives on different business issues. Additionally, they do not just interact in formal classroom settings, but many informal gathering activities have also provided them opportunities to exchange with each other. In other words, they are not just classmates; they are learning partners. To be more exact, they become lifelong learning partners. It is much more than a social network can provide.

This research has showed that the success of the EMBA program is based on building trustworthy relationships among the students through both formal and informal approaches. Students will not be transformed if they don't have an honest and trustworthy learning environment.

#### 6.3.5 Close Relationship with Professors

Professors play an essential role in the EMBA learning journey. First, they are the knowledge and skills source; students expect to gain the latest knowledge through their teaching. Secondly, Professors are supposed to facilitate to discuss different business cases. EMBA students are all adult learners. They all have their own experiences and opinions about different issues. While a Professor has to stimulate students to discuss on problems, they have to regulate hot debates and stop side tracked discussion. Additionally, some students may be more experienced than the Professors in a particular area. They have to know how to make use of the students' expertise without losing the confidence of the students, For instance, Jan mentioned that once she was stunned as a student in the class knew a certain issue better than the Professor. Angel treasured the openness and honesty of the Professors in dealing with different situations. Instead of exerting the authority of Professor, he or she has to handle the discussion tactfully. On the other hand, students may treat their Professors as lifelong learning consultant; they will bring in their working issues to discuss in the class. Jan has asked her information management professor to provide consultation on installing new information system.

Therefore, unlike undergraduate programs, EMBA professors have a much closer relationship with the students who are business leaders in their own areas.

#### 6.3.6 Diversified Pedagogy

Pedagogy was not too much mentioned during the interview. Most of interviewees did not express any specific expectation on pedagogy. However, Angel was stunned when a marketing

Professor using singing to convey the concepts. Doris was disappointed with the pedagogy as she was the Principal of a high school. She expected the pedagogy to be interactive and the class should be small in size. Otherwise, she would not think it was worthy to pay such a high amount of tuition fees. She has also mentioned that the quality of teaching varies widely. She could only name a couple of Professors that she perceived had utilized good pedagogy. Doris believed:

Professors might need to put in more “pedagogy.” Only two professors got some, but I cannot feel much in others courses. I expected EMBA program should use approaches such as experiential learning and constructivism. Interactions among the groups should have been more emphasized. An EMBA program wasn’t worth several hundred thousand dollars if it was just a program mainly delivered through lecture. (p64)

What interviewees appreciated most was the residential trip (r-trip) in which students were required to conduct a ten day consultation project for a company in China. Interviewees found this kind of activity based pedagogy was memorable and beneficial for business leaders with rich working experiences. Different unique teaching approaches can also be eye opening. Mary recalled:

Professors use different methods to teach. It opens up my learning experiences. Like using the Dao Da Jin ( 道 大 金 ) to teach marketing, the r-trip, the visit to UC Berkeley. (p 68)

It was quite a surprise to the students as Dao Da Jin was a classical book that talked about the ethical values of Chinese ethics. James found that r-trip was a critical pedagogy as the question was identified by the group rather than being assigned by the Professor. He said:

One of the special attributes of this kind of project is, unlike classroom practice, the questions were not from the teachers, but you need to identify the questions yourself. (p19)

This research has shown that different unique pedagogy has stunned students and in turn, provides a new educational perspective to the students. The Professors outside Hong Kong has also stimulated their thinking. Moreover, it was considered an eye opening experience.



## 6.4 Personal Drivers of Learners

In the ten steps of Mezirow's transformative learning, he has identified the process of the transformation. However, the research results were derived by the study of the returning students of a Women's college, but the drivers of the learners have not been fully explored. In the following section, I will identify the personal drivers that can affect an EMBA student to gain the values of the EMBA program. Four basic themes have been identified (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Table 12 The Personal issues/Drivers of Learners

Personal issues/Drivers of learners
1. Motivations and expectations
2. Working experiences (Position & Authority)
3. Learning experiences
4. Triggering Events

### 6.4.1 Motivations and Expectations

In the past literature, many researchers have identified the motivations that drive students to pursue MBA programs (Thompson & Gui, 2000; Armstrong, 1995; Crainer & Dearlover, 1999; Chen & Doherty, 2013). These motivations can be summarized into three categories:

Knowing what – knowledge and skills acquiring

Knowing who – building up social network

Knowing why – understanding how business concepts can be applied

While knowledge and skills acquiring have been mentioned by many of the interviewees, their motivations for acquiring new knowledge and skills are quite different. Allan mentioned that he wanted to know the gap between what he had been practicing and the business theories to be advocated in the academic world. Tommy in particular mentioned that he wanted to get skills and knowledge that can help him to manage a team with diversified talent. Doris wanted to expand her horizon as she used to be high school principal. Therefore, the reason for acquiring

more skills and knowledge can be entirely different. For Allan, he wanted to affirm himself and change his identity through the learning process. For others, they may want to solve their problems or identify the right career direction with the new knowledge and skills (Table 13).

During the interviews, only Katie mentioned that she wanted to build-up her social network. In fact, Allan has particularly mentioned that he was not there to create social networks as he could easily connect with the people if he wants to. However, Christy admitted that social networks were an important source to build up successful business among her classmates. Edward mentioned he wanted to learn more from people with diversified background. However, it is quite different from building a social network for developing business. The primary motivation is for learning rather than grasping business opportunities. James wanted to stay competitive, so he intends to get the most updated information and intelligence from both professors and classmates.

The interviewees did not mention too much about understanding the “why” behind the business theories or knowledge. However, they did mention that they wanted to build up new approaches to run their business. Both Angel and Bob wanted to learn about strategy development. However, they did not intend to carefully investigate the rationale behind. They would rather have a more structured or systematic approach to deal with their business issues.

Affirmation is a reason that is rarely mentioned in other research work. Both Allan and Jan wanted to know what the gaps are between the academic theory and their experiences. Allan, in particular, wanted to demonstrate that what he had been practicing was just as good as the academic theory. However, Jan is more open and ready to learn something she might have learned through her experiences. This motivation should be unique to the students of EMBA programs as it is the program that is composed of business leaders with rich experiences.

Both Jan and Mary mention that they want to get the qualification. Interestingly, they are both executives working in multi-national corporations. However, for those who are entrepreneurs, they have never mentioned this as their motivation.

Unlike the other past work, this research has identified that career advancement is not the only

reason for pursuing the EMBA degrees. In fact, interviewees were looking for opportunities for life breakthrough. Some of them wanted to be recognized or affirmed by the others as capable business leaders.

Table 13 The Motivation and Expectations of Interviewees

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Expectations</b>
1. James	To stay competitive in the field	To keep abreast with the business trends
2. Katie	To run her own company and build social life	To manage the business professional
3. Harry	To seek advice on upgrading my business	To expand his business horizon and get into other business areas
4. Bob	To develop sustainable strategy and planning for the company	To make his business more sustainable strategically
5. Christy	To obtain professional knowledge or know-how to compete in the real world	To run her own business more effectively
6. Angel	To obtain a more strategic or rational thinking & strategy	To start a new career as a consultant
7. Tommy	To manage a team with diversified talent	To get career advancement
8. Allan	To test the gap between what he has practiced & the business theories	To affirm that he is a capable and professional
9. Edward	To learn from people from different background and talents	To expand his horizon in business
10. Jan	To get an academy qualification	To learn something new outside her areas
11. Doris	To improve my management and administrative skills	To manage her high school more effectively
12. Mary	To get recognition in the business field	To get career advancement

In summary, past research related to the motivations of pursuing EMBA program provided only superficial motivations without giving in-depth insights. For instance, building a social network or “knowing who” had been considered as a common motivation for getting into an EMBA program. However, the reason for meeting with more people may be different. In this study, it was found that they were not here to be associated with people of high social status, but instead, they looked for new ideas and stimulations through interacting with diversified talents in a learning environment. Many of them expressed that they had found a lifelong learning network in the EMBA program as they were learning partners throughout the EMBA program. Even when participants may have the similar motivation, their expectation or outcomes can be quite different.

#### 6.4.2 Working Experience (Position & Authority)

Many of interviewees found the EMBA knowledge and skills acquired were practical and impactful to themselves as well as to their companies. However, the typical background of these interviewees is that they have the authority and opportunities to apply what they have learned in their working environment.

Tommy was stunned when first learned about how the concepts “matrix organization” could be implemented in the real world. He then worked as the CEO for a company and implemented “matrix organization.” Jan was confident enough to revamp the IT system in the company after learning the course MIS. Before that, she dare not change the IT system as she thought she was not an IT expert and did not know how to communicate with the IT colleagues. James applied what he had learned from the negotiation course immediately and had successfully saved a significant amount of money.

The common point of the above incidents was that the interviewees had the decision authority to apply what they had learned. As Mezirow(2000) mentioned, transformative learning occurred only when new experiences are encountered by the learners. For those who have authority or opportunities to apply what they have learned, they can experience the practicality of the

knowledge and skills they have learned. Consequently, they have a higher chance to examine their own assumptions. While some interviewees did appreciate the knowledge and skills acquired, they were senior executives of multinational corporations and might not have the authority to implement what they had learned in the EMBA program. As a result, they might be even doubtful about the practicality of the knowledge and skills acquired. Allan claimed that what he had learned in marketing and strategy management was not practical at all. He challenged whether the Professors had applied what they had taught. On the other hand, Allan was not up to the level and status that he could develop and execute the strategic plan. He worked in a family based business, and only close family members deserved the right to make high-level decision.

This research has shown that the values of EMBA depend very much on the position and the authority of interviewees in their company. For those who cannot execute or apply what they have learned is less likely to be transformed as they cannot see the practical values of the new skills and knowledge acquired. Additionally, participant like Allan was reluctant to change as he had been a successful business leader for more than 20 years. So, his work experiences and success have blocked him from transformation.

#### 6.4.3 Learning Experiences

The interviewees' previous learning experiences varied quite significantly. On one hand, some interviewees had never had undergraduate education before joining the EMBA program. On the other hand, some interviewees had more than one master degree. All of the interviewees got their high school education in Hong Kong. However, Tommy was the one that had obtained his undergraduate degree in China. In other words, Tommy was the only interviewee that had used Chinese as their media of instruction when pursuing his undergraduate program.

For those who had never got an undergraduate degree that were well recognized, affirmation appeared to be a common motivation for them to pursue the EMBA program. However, these interviewees could be further classified into subgroups. Some might just want to show that they were just as good as degree holders. For instance, being a non-degree holder, Allan was not

comfortable with his own identity as he perceived his boss always thought he was only a competent management professional. Jan wanted to validate if there was a gap between what she had learned through work experiences and the business theories and frameworks. Harry was pressured by his subordinates as all of them were degree holders, and one had even got a doctoral degree.

Interestingly, even all the non-degree holders had to seek academic affirmation. Nevertheless, all except Allan had never mentioned that affirmation was the most valuable component to them after studying the EMBA program. All the values they mentioned were not related to affirmation.

In this research, it is noted that the past learning experience might not significantly affect one's learning experience. However, it could have an impact on the motivation and expectation of a student and in turn affects one's learning attitude which may block one's openness to judge the values of the new knowledge and skills. As Vazquez and Ruas (2012) mentioned the most relevant learning experience is:

“openness to exploit new ways of interpreting the world.”

#### 6.4.4 Triggering Event

Based on the interview results, Table 14 summarized the triggering events or conditions that have transformed the learners. The results echoed what Mezirow (2000) proposed in his later research. Transformation can be triggered by epochal transformation. Or, it may also happen when a series of experiences have been encounters. While Bob, Harry, Angel and Doris were transformed through a series of interaction with professors and the other students, the other eight students are transformed by a significant triggering event.

For those who have been transformed because of a triggering event, they are either touched emotionally or the outcome of the event is different significantly from their expectation. For instance, Tommy never expected that the matrix management concept can really be implemented by most of the classmates' companies. Mary's triggering event was experiencing

the private jet. It is the experience she had never tried before even though the event did not happen within formal classroom learning. However, many of the others were transformed because of their continual interactions with other learners and Professors.

It is noted that the triggering can be an event that violates their management assumptions or beliefs. Jimmy was stunned as he had never expected that what he learned could be applied immediately and the result was so impactful. However, the triggering event can be related to their life experience. Both Mary and Katie have encountered something that they had never encountered before. Mary had never tried private jet while Katie had never attended a church.

The setting of the triggering event can be quite different. Tommy and Allan encountered their triggering event surrounded by a group of students. Tommy was stunned because he had noted that he was the only one in the class that believed matrix management system did not work. On the other hand, Allan was transformed because he had finally recognized by a group of business leaders whom he respected. Interestingly, Tommy was transformed because he was excluded from the group while Allan was transformed because he had been included by a group.

In summary, triggering events can happen inside or outside the classroom setting. Participants had a transformative learning experience because they have encountered events that they have never experienced or out of their expectation. The other participants have played a critical role in facilitating the transformative process. Their encouragement to the participants and the open and honest discussion are keys for transformative learning. So, a triggering event may not necessarily be a life crisis, but something that can touch or surprise the participants.



Table 14 Triggering Events (Conditions) for Transformation and Major Outcomes

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Trigger Events/Conditions for Transformation</b>	<b>Major Outcomes</b>
1. James	Application of negotiation	Change his habit of thinking
2. Katie	Attending the Church first time	New perspectives on the value of professors and life
3. Harry	Confidence gained through continuous interacting and exchanging with retail experts	To expand his business horizon and get into other business areas
4. Bob	Continuously interacting and exchanging with classmates and professors	Strategic planning using a framework instead of based on intuition
5. Christy	Emotionally touched by the support of the teammates	Confirmed she is capable to be a successful business lady
6. Angel	Continuously interacting and exchanging with classmates and professors	Became a consultant with strategic or rational thinking
7. Tommy	Realized that all classmates have implemented matrix management concept which he did not believe at all	New perspective of management
8. Allan	Recognized as most valuable learning partner by the classmates at graduation date	Confirmed the new identity (a capable management professional)
9. Edward	Interactions with professionals during the residential trip in China	Open his career in China
10. Jan	Encountering professors from UC Berkeley	New perspective of management
11. Doris	Continuously interacting and exchanging with classmates and professors	New management style and administration
12. Mary	Flying private jet with her classrooms after visiting UC Berkeley	Expand her horizon and life experiences

## 6.5 Summary

### 6.5.1 Comparing with the Past Literature

Twelve basic themes about the values and meaning were identified. While many of the themes have been identified by other researchers, in this research, more in-depth insights related to the values of EMBA are identified. In particular, themes including business intelligence, facing new challenges, and relationship with the others (Table 15) that have not been emphasized by the past research are now emphasized. More importantly, the factors facilitating and blocking students to gain these values have also been identified.

Table 15 The values and meaning identified that have not been emphasized before

<b>Values and Meaning of the EMBA program identified (Not Emphasized Before)</b>	
Business Intelligence	Get information or knowledge that are not available in the public
Facing New Challenge	Gain a trustworthy network with experts in different industry who can act as consultants or mentors
Relationship with the Others	Become the role model of transformative learning and strengthen the trust with colleagues, friends and even family

### 6.5.2 New Insights Gained from the Cross Analysis

In the context of EMBA, students may not specifically share their transformative learning, but they do realize the way they look at things are different after the EMBA learning journey. The values of the EMBA program is much more than skills and knowledge, these values are the integration of the outcomes of transformative learning that can even impact their life.

Many researchers's (Mintzberg, 2000; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002, 2004) critique about MBA programs was that MBA programs have not done a good job in training better managers. That is, they looked at the values of MBA programs and EMBA programs from a more instrumental learning point of view. These researchers (Gold 2007, 2010; Grey, 2009; O'Toole, 2009) just believed that MBA programs should equip learners with knowledge and skills to fulfill their task. In this research, the interviewees did mention that new knowledge and skills were important to their career. However, these new knowledge and skills should stimulate their thinking and challenge their assumptions. In fact, the values that the interviewees treasure are more than career development, interviewees also treasure the ones that can transform or renew their life.

As stated in Chapter 1 and 2, many prestigious Universities have already changed their direction. Instead of focusing on promoting their content and curriculum, these Universities claim that students will experience a transformative learning journey (HEC ,2018; The Wharton School, 2018; (Cambridge Judge Business School, n.d.)). In fact, based on the data collected from interviews of the research, the results echo that business leaders treasure the transformative outcomes even though their expectations relate more to the development of skills and knowledge acquired before they have gone through the EMBA journey.

The previous research (Chapter 2) has only mentioned the principles of how transformative learning can occur. In this research, six factors that can facilitate transformative learning (Table 10) and six factors that block transformative learning have been identified (Table 11). Also, I have discussed how a participant's profile can affect how they can gain these values. More importantly, they have provided insights in the teaching and learning practices that can facilitate learners to be transformed. The details of the contributions and implications of this research will be discussed in the next Chapter.

## Chapter 7. Conclusion & Recommendations

In Chapter 6, I have discussed the themes identified from the interviews. In this section, I will first discuss what the implications of the themes are to the proposed research questions. Then, I will recommend how an EMBA should be implemented if one wants to implement transformative learning effectively in the program. Finally, I will discuss about the limitations of the research and the future research topics to be explored.

### 7.1 Contribution to the Answers of the Research Questions

In this section, I will discuss how the themes identified answer to the proposed research questions. These questions are:

1. What are the factors motivating people to study an EMBA program and what are the expectations of learners?
2. What are the outcomes and the meaning of the EMBA program to the students?  
To what extent can learners be transformed in the EMBA program?
3. What are the conditions, triggering events, and processes that shape the transformation of EMBA participants?

#### 7.1.1 What are the factors motivating people to study an EMBA program and what are the expectations of learners?

Every EMBA participant may have different expectations and motivations in enrolling the EMBA program. Many of interviewees were at the cross road or look for breakthroughs in their career or even life. When they were asked about the overall values of the EMBA program, they did not mention too much what they expected to achieve. Instead, they all talked about the life impact of EMBA on them.

As mentioned before, based on the past literature (Chen & Doherty, 2013; Thompson & Gui,

2000), MBA students focus very much on gaining three values, namely, knowing “what”, knowing “who” and knowing “why”. However, the meaning of them to the interviewees of this research is entirely different from the past literature. Interviewees talked about knowing “what”, but they emphasized more on how the new knowledge and skills changed their perspectives and habit of thinking rather than just the content. New knowledge and skills are expected to serve as stimulation to problem solving. When it comes to talk about knowing “who”, they did not focus on getting connections to build up their business, but, they talked about learning partnerships or trustworthy network. They treasured the open and honest sharing with the other students. Angel claimed that if she needed help one day, she knew for sure that her learning partners would try their best to help her out.

In this study, interviewees did not share much about knowing “why” but they were stunned when applying what they have learned. For instance, James did not expect the negotiation techniques were so powerful that he could use it immediately and gained considerable results.

Interviewees did rarely use the term “transformative” to describe their outcomes and expectation. However, they have been using the word “new” to describe what they expect. They want “new knowledge,” “new way of thinking,” “new approach and methodology” and even “new life direction.” Alternatively, to a certain extent, they did expect some degree of transformation, but, it is only after they have completed the study that they realize what they have gained from the EMBA program.

This research has identified that EMBA students may not have the motivation to transform themselves before entering the EMBA program. Interviewees may have a certain problem that they expect to be resolved through the EMBA program, they do not expect to get all the values that they can gain in an EMBA program. However, for those who are looking for something new such as new ideas, skills, knowledge and direction, they are the ones who are more ready to be transformed.

In conclusion, the outcomes of the EMBA program have gone beyond the expectations of the students. No matter what the motivations of the students are, they can be transformed if they are willing to reflect on the new experiences encountered. To understand the full values of the

EMBA program, one has to investigate both transformative and non-transformative values.

### 7.1.2 What are the outcomes and the meaning of the EMBA program to the students?

In 0, I have classified the values of the EMBA program into two types, namely, “values as the source for preparing the future of the participants” and “source for transformation”. However, the values to the participants can be classified based on another two practical dimensions, namely, the values to their career and the values to their personal life.

In the past research work, EMBA and MBA have been criticized by many researchers that these programs cannot really help participants to perform better in their work environment. However, based this research, participants have actually gained values that are directly related to their work environment. (Table 9). As mentioned by Longmore et. al (2017), in the rapidly changing business environment corporations need workers that can perform beyond their own expertise, they must be flexible, reflective and learning-oriented competencies. The transformative learning process has played a role in training workers to fulfil these needs. For instance, Katie has changed her management styles and become a more open manger. Harry has become more willing to trust employees and their subordinates. EMBA has transformed them to become more ready to change and expand their business horizon. Bob has also changed his management style significantly. Instead of using his intuition to run business, he has started the frameworks that he has learned to formulate his company’s strategy on different projects. Angel has also claimed that she has become a more rational manager and is able to formulate plans more strategically.

For senior executives, the EMBA has connected them to different business opportunities and in turn expand their career. Edward has transferred himself to China for career advancement. He mentioned that he would not be able to take this step without the encouragement of the other EMBA participants. With the business intelligence gained, they have open their business horizon. Harry has become more confident to open his retail chain as he knows that he would be supported by his classmates which can be considered as his mentors as well as consultant. Doris has also expanded her horizon. Instead of being just an educationist, she now can be an

effective education administrator. Being the role models of learning, they have built up more trustworthy relationship with their subordinates, boss and vendors. In other words, they have been transformed into better business professionals and leaders and are well recognized by the other people. In other words, the transformative learning process has well equipped them to face the new business environment.

In terms of the values of EMBA to interviewees' personal life, they have gained the transformative values that are identified in the research under different condition. They have encountered triggering events that have life impact on them outside the classroom. Katie encountered her first religious activity at Shanghai and stimulated her to rethink about her spiritual life. To Mary, taking a private jet with all the classmates to attend another classmate's wedding is a memorable experience as she could relate to the strong relationship with her classmates. To Allan, the EMBA means an affirmation of his capability as a senior executive after he has been working in the bank industries for more than 40 years. He has demonstrated to the others that he is capable. But, their influence as a role model to their family and friends is something that go beyond their expectation.

### 7.1.3 To what extent learners may be transformed in the EMBA program?

Though all interviewees have been transformed to a certain extent, the degree of their transformation is quite different. One may even argue if certain transformation should be credited to the EMBA journey. For instance, the triggering event of Mary was her private jet experience which was not part of the design of the EMBA program. It has just happened that one of classmates of her cohort was generous enough to rent a private jet to serve all the classmates. Of course, one may argue back that the EMBA programs are developed for senior executives and business leaders, hence, similar experiences may happen at different cohorts.

It was also mentioned by the interviewees that they had also encountered challenges dealing with group members. As mentioned before, if a team is in high spirit, then they can learn effectively and the exchanges are valuable. However, it may also happen that one or more team

members cannot commit their time and effort for various reasons and they may even become free riders. Under this condition, the spirit of the team will be hurt and in turn negatively affect the EMBA learning experience.

Many students join the EMBA with the expectation to acquire new knowledge and skills. However, some may expect that they are not supposed to contribute in the class as they believe that they are the customers of the program. They expect to gain what they want from the Professors. In a sense, they expect EMBA learning is a kind of consumer-oriented learning, and the program should be designed based on their own individual needs. Hence, they are not willing to contribute in the class, resulting in the learning environment to become a consumer-based learning environment. In a worst case scenario, a student may insist that every classmate follow his/her decision. While some cohorts can compromise, some cohorts that cannot compromise result in blocking the transformative learning process. In fact, people may even complain against the EMBA program if the Professor cannot manage the class effectively.

While there is not a unified definition on transformative learning, the results of this research do echo on most of the outcomes of the different researchers that have been proposed. For instance, the identity changes as proposed by Illeris (2014) has been identified as the outcome of transformation. The themes such as changing the habit of minds and perspectives also are consistent with what Mezirow has proposed (1978a, 1978b, 1997, 2000). Hilgert(1995, 1996) has mentioned that EMBA is more than just skills and knowledge, it can impact on the participants' relationship with the others. However, it has not identified that the participants are perceived as more trustworthy by the other stakeholders.

However, this research shows that the outcomes of transformative learning is an integration of what the researchers have mentioned and not one perspective should be singled out. Original assumptions have been reexamined and new actions have been taken. However, transformation may or may not lead to actions, or the action take place immediately after the learning process.

As stated in the themes identified, the values of EMBA program come from both transformative and non-transformative outcomes. While the definition of transformative learning may be



defined by different researchers, many experiences of the interviewees encountered were considered as transformative learning by various investigators. Defined by Mezirow (1991), transformative learning is the changing of point of view, perspectives and habits of minds. This kind of changes was shown during the interviews, and the interviewees had stated how the EMBA programs have change their perspectives, not just regarding business perspectives, but also the life perspectives. For instance, Doris said how she had changed her understanding about the behavior and the values of business people.

Illeris (2014) claimed that the unified outcome of transformative learning should be the identity transformation. In this study, it is quite clear that interviewees have changed their identity to become more confident as they are now considered as management professionals. Even their friends, family members, and colleagues have looked at them from a different positive angle.

Many researchers ((Donaldson, 2009; Easton et al., 2009 and Macleod & Egan, 2009) have also advocated that transformative should create life impact and the results of the study echoed what they advocated.

The EMBA program has played a critical role in creating transformative learning experiences to the learners. In fact, the outcomes can pass the assessment of different definitions proposed by different researchers.

This research has shown that EMBA can transform students effectively with the appropriate settings, environment and the right combination of students in the same cohort. More detail about the environment and experiences that can facilitate transformative learning will be discussed later in section 0.

However, without the right motivation and expectation, students may just remain status quote. For instance, Allan just wanted to show that he is a capable businessman and has assumed that the EMBA program was too theoretical to be practiced. The value that he gained from EMBA was limited and the transformation was not that effective. Thus, transformative learning occurs when students have the right motivation and interact with the right learning environment and experiences.

#### 7.1.4 How does transformation occur in an EMBA program?

In the last two sections, I have discussed to what extent the EMBA participants have been transformed. In this section, I will discuss how transformative learning can be facilitated.

During the interviews, the interaction with different talents have been mostly mentioned and appreciated. These interactions have been a source of new knowledge and opportunities. More importantly, the learning network formed can lead a life-long learning network. However, the formation of this network is built based on open and honest exchanges. It occurs because there is no conflict of interest. Of course, the question is why there is no conflict of interests, and all these highly experienced executives or entrepreneurs are so willing to share openly and honestly without being concerned that their business intelligence could be leaked outside.

Based on the proposed theoretical framework in this research, there are three major factors that can affect learners to gain the transformative and non-transformative values that are identified. These include (i) learning experiences and pedagogy (ii) learning environment (atmosphere) (iii) person profile & learning attitude. Though pedagogy and learning atmosphere are mainly created by the Professors or the instructors, learners also play a critical role facilitating the learning experiences. As they are business leaders in their fields, heated argument and debate may occur among themselves on different business issues and practices. They have to know when to stop and reconcile. Therefore, other than being team leaders, they have to learn when to be team supporters and facilitators. More importantly, they have to open up themselves and be ready to reflect on new experiences that they will encounter.

On the other hand, they must also be willing to take the new learning challenges. Five themes related to facilitation to learning include (i) unfamiliar subjects (ii) time management (iii) team management (iv) relationships with professors and (v) relationships with other students are identified. To gain the best values out of the EMBA program, they have to commit to reallocate their time, build relationships with people who may have different personality, and willing to spend effort to understand the subjects that they are unfamiliar and weak.

When comparing with the existing transformative learning theories, generally speaking, no individual exactly follows the transformative framework developed by different researchers. However, I can find that the transformative experiences of the interviewees are consistent with some research results obtained by different investigators. One common point of the transformation of interviewees is that they all have encountered new experiences, which surprised or even stunned them. These new experiences challenged their assumptions or values directly (Table 14). Tommy and James have been transformed under a more rational reflection. They both encountered triggering events which challenge their original assumptions. Through a more rational reflection, they had changed their management perspectives. On the other hand, Christy was touched emotionally through the support of her classmates who affirmed her capability as a successful business lady. Mary has expanded her life horizon outside the formal learning setting. Her emotion was touched when taking the private jet to join the wedding ceremony of her classmate. Katie was touched as she was invited by a Professor to join the Sunday worship in Shanghai. Again, all these transformations occurred outside the classroom settings. In other words, both formal and informal learning can contribute to transformative learning as long as students have trusting relationship with other students and professors. It echoed what Cranton (1994a, 2006, 2009) advocated as it is believed that transformative learning can be facilitated through authentic relationships. Also, transformative learning can occur depending on the learning style of each learner. Of course, it is consistent with the claim of Boyd (1991). It is believed that transformative learning could be facilitated using group experience.

In summary, this study shows that transformative learning can occur under different conditions, it can be triggered by an event or a continuous process. However, two essential elements for transformative learning to occur are the open and honest interaction, which in turn is the result of a strong trust relationship among learners and professors. The other essential elements are new experiences, which can be encountered in both formal and informal learning settings. Table 16 and Table 17 show how transformative and non-transformative values can be achieved respectively.

Table 16 Conditions for Achieving the Identified Values (EMBA as a Source of Transformation)

<b>EMBA as a Source of Transformation</b>	<b>Conditions for achieving these values</b>
1. New perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> Interaction with diversified talents with no conflicts of interest <input type="checkbox"/> Application of acquiring of new knowledge and skills
2. New Habit of Thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Interaction with diversified talents with no conflicts of interest <input type="checkbox"/> New experiences encounter through group projects and field trips <input type="checkbox"/> New knowledge and skills through formal and informal gathering
3. New Identity	<input type="checkbox"/> Perception of the external parties <input type="checkbox"/> Academic qualification granted by the University
4. New Management Style	<input type="checkbox"/> Stimulation and interaction with the learning partners <input type="checkbox"/> Changing the perception of the subordinates
5. Personal Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning how to be systematic and structured approach to analyze a problem through the new skills and knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Improving in communication, teamwork and project management through group assignments and projects
6. Relationship with Others	<input type="checkbox"/> Established a trustworthy relationship among students <input type="checkbox"/> Acted as a role model for transforming the family member <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperated with business stakeholders with a new identity

Table 17 Conditions for Achieving the Identified Values (EMBA as a Source to Prepare Learner's Future)

EMBA as a Source to Prepare Learner's Future	Conditions for achieving these values
1. Source of Opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy mentorship leading to exchanging of new business ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Career advancement through sharing of ideas and connection
2. New Knowledge & Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Formal class room learning with a variety of pedagogy <input type="checkbox"/> Informal social gathering to establish relationship and exchanging experiences and ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Open and honest discussion among the students and the Professors <input type="checkbox"/> Field trips and group projects
3. Business Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/> An established trustworthy learning partner relationship through continual interaction in formal and informal settings <input type="checkbox"/> A group of students with no conflict of interest
4. Career Transformation/ Development	<input type="checkbox"/> An established trustworthy learning partner relationship through continual interaction in formal and informal settings <input type="checkbox"/> A group of students with no conflict of interest <input type="checkbox"/> A group of students from different industries
5. Facing New Challenge	<input type="checkbox"/> A group of trustworthy learning partners who are experts in different areas <input type="checkbox"/> A group of learning partners who are willing to be the mentors and share experiences
6. Life Impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining a trustworthy relationships with others <input type="checkbox"/> A role model to stimulate close friends and family to be transformed <input type="checkbox"/> An attitude to accept others with diversified background <input type="checkbox"/> Applications of what have learned in the program

## 7.2 Contribution to Knowledge

In this section, I will use the theoretical framework to organize my key findings. First, I will discuss the transformative values of the EMBA program identified based on the interviews. Then, I will discuss how the learning environment and experiences of the EMBA programs have facilitated transformative learning. In particular, I will discuss the collective transformative learning effect. Finally, I will discuss how the profiles of the participants will influence the learning outcomes.

### 7.2.1 The Transformative Values of EMBA Program

#### 7.2.1.1 *The Personal Transformative Values*

Based on the interviews of the 12 participants, I have identified all the values of EMBA program that have been discussed in the previous research (Chapter 2). For instance, Chia and Holt (2008) has discussed the changes of the identity of MBA students. They are perceived as more capable managers after graduation. Hilgert (1985, 1956) has mentioned that impact of MBA to the relationships between the MBA graduates and the others. Vazquez and Ruas (2012) identified that EMBA students treasure on new experiences which lead them to see the world from different perspectives. Han and Liang (2015) has identified that EMBA is a self-discovery and life renewal process. Additionally, values especially those that are related to transformative learning have also been identified. More importantly, the new meaning and values of three motivations Chen et al. (2012), namely, knowing “what”, knowing “who” and knowing “why” have also been identified based on the interviews of this research (Table 18).

Table 18 A Comparison of the Motivation and Expectation

<b>Past Literature</b>	<b>This Research</b>
Knowing “what” aims to perform better in the work environment	Knowing “what” as a source of stimulation and transformation
Knowing “who” aims to build social network and business opportunities	Knowing “who” aims to develop a trustworthy network to face the new challenge
Knowing “why” aims to understand how to apply the knowledge and skills acquired	Knowing “why” aims to apply the new skills and knowledge to solve problems

The impact of knowing “what” on the work performance have been emphasized and considered as a major value of an EMBA program in the past. However, the transformative value obtains through instrumental learning in the EMBA program have been neglected. This research provides a new perspective on the meaning and values of instrumental learning. From a transformative perspective, new knowledge and skills especially those insights that they cannot gain in the public, can stimulate students to re-examine their assumptions. It challenges what the participants’ believe especially those beliefs and values that are related to business and management. So, new knowledge and skills can also play a critical role in transformative learning.

Many researchers have identified that EMBA participants would like to use EMBA as a social network and treat it as a source of business opportunities. In other words, knowing “who” has been considered another major value of the EMBA program. But, in this research, the value of EMBA is more than a social network. It is a trustworthy network where they can exchange and share openly and honestly. Most importantly, EMBA is a network that can encourage them to be transformed as they respect the members of the EMBA as business leaders who are well qualified to be their mentors. Hence, they feel safer to take actions that they have never tried before. As a result, interviewees are more ready to change. Through the new experiences gained,

they have changed their habits of mind and perspective and transformation has been occurred. So, the other participants have also become the facilitators for transformation. All EMBA participants can gain a trustworthy learning network that can support them to face the new changing environment.

“Knowing why” is another common motivation for participants to join the EMBA. Knowing “why” means that participants would like to know how the new business knowledge and skills can be applied in their own business environment. In this research, the opportunities in applying what participants have learned can also serve transformative opportunities. It is identified that participants can even be stunned or emotionally touched when they see the power of the new business knowledge and skills applying in their own business environment. Again, it will challenge their old business practices and assumptions and hence transforms their perspectives. Therefore, the outcomes of the EMBA program can be transformative even though the motivation and expectation of the participants do not place emphasis on transformative learning.

#### *7.2.1.2 New Transformative Values Identified*

Based on the literature review (Chapter 2), most of the previous research (Boyd, 1991; Mezirow, 1997, 1978b, 2000; Kegan, 2000; Cranton 2009; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Illeris 2014) focuses on the impact of transformative learning at the individual level. In this research, it has also been identified that the transformation impact can affect others. Many interviewees have mentioned their family members, colleagues and friends have witnessed their transformation. The transformative experiences of the interviewees have demonstrated their determination and commitment on learning. As a result, some of their close friends and family member have also changed the learning attitude. The relationship with the others and in particular their business partners and vendors have also been changed as the participants are recognized as professional managers. They have a new identity which is well recognized in the business world. More importantly, their management style has also been changed. The participants have become more open managers.



Table 19 The Impact of Personal Transformation to the Others

Those who are Influenced	Impact
1. Vendor	Participants become a more trustworthy partners
2. Subordinate	Participants become a more open manager
3. Boss	Participants are recognized as professional managers
4. Family members	Participants have a role model of life-long learner
5. Friends	Participants have motivated the others to change themselves

### 7.2.2 Learning Journey (Experience)

As Mezirow (2000) has pointed out that transformation can occur either when someone has encountered a drastic event or through a series of experiences, this section will discuss how the experiences and the triggering events can influence the transformative learning of the interviewees. In particular, I will discuss the experiences of the interviewees on their interactions with the professors and other participants. Then, I will discuss highlight how the diversified pedagogies have facilitated the transformative learning. Finally, I will discuss the triggering events reported by the interviewees.

#### 7.2.2.1 Interaction with Professors and Participants

While most of the researchers discuss transformative learning from a more personal point of view, this research has identified the interactions with other participants and professors play a significant role. Other participants are sources to stimulate each other to rethink their values and challenge each other's assumptions. They are transformed through a series of interactions with

professors and the other students both in informal and formal learning settings. In fact, most of the interviewees encountered their triggering events outside the classroom. The triggering events may not even be related to the academic aspect.

Some of the participants will even treat the others as consultants when they have encountered business or life issues. Therefore, they are more willing to listen to the opinions from other participants. In fact, as they respect each other's expertise, they are more ready and willing to change. Therefore, a trustworthy learning network of EMBA plays two important roles. On one hand, it is a network of learning business intelligence and latest information of the market. On the other hand, it creates an atmosphere that facilitate transformative learning.

During the EMBA journey, participants have encountered new skills and knowledge that become a source of transformation too as these skills and knowledge may challenge their old assumptions and push them to re-examine their old practice and values. In fact, many interviewees such as Tommy have been transformed because they have encountered new knowledge and business practices that were totally beyond their expectation.

#### *7.2.2.2 Professors using diversified pedagogy to stimulate group discussion*

Another important factor that facilitating transformative learning is the pedagogy chosen by the Professors. Though Professors are a source of knowledge as they will bring in the latest knowledge, they are also facilitators and participants when they conduct group discussion. Most importantly, the pedagogy used by the Professors can actually facilitate or block the transformative learning as different pedagogy may require a different level of discussion and participation. For instance, it has been mentioned the consulting project was a memorable experience as a team has to complete a project within a short period of time. Under this condition, all team members had to help out each other. As a result, the trust among team members have been strengthening significantly and facilitate transformative learning.

### 7.2.2.3 *Triggering Events*

During the EMBA learning journey, the triggering events play a critical role in transforming the participants, and even some interviewees are transformed through a series of encounters. In this research, it is identified that the expectation and motivation of the participants are related to the triggering events. For instance, degree holders may not find using a framework approach as valuable as they may have learned it in higher education. However, for many business owners without higher degree, they may find this approach eye opening. Participants transform because what they have encountered is out of their expectation or significantly different from their past experience. In particular, the EMBA participants have very strong experiences in business and tend to believe in their past experiences.

Another interesting point is that the source of triggering event can come from the diversified pedagogy as it can also change their habit of mind in terms of learning. Some interviewees have encountered learning activities that go beyond their imagination. For instance, a professor sings and asks the participants to join in during a marketing lecture.

Nevertheless, the triggering event may happen outside the classroom or informal settings. The triggering event may even relate to the life experience of the participants. For instance, an interviewee was stunned as she was invited to attend a church worship by a professor. This encounter triggers her to rethink about her life and break the assumption that a professor only cares about academic stuff rather than life development.

### 7.2.3 *Learning Environment (Atmosphere)*

While the past research has identified some factors that can facilitate the learning environment that can facilitate transformative learning, this research has identified other factors that have not been discussed (Table 20).

Table 20 The Learning Environment (Atmosphere) Facilitating Transformative Learning

<b>Factors Identified in the past research</b>	<b>Additional Factors Identified in this research</b>
Equal right to express in a group learning environment	Learners as peacemaker and facilitator in group discussion
Discourse without threat/ Open and honest discussion	A trustworthy learning network with small class
Trustworthy relationship with professors & students	Team members with high spirit in learning

In the previous research (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000, 2012) about transformative learning, researchers emphasized the studying experience encountered and the self-reflection process when they discuss about how transformation occurs. Mezirow (2000) has highlighted that transformation can be facilitated when participants have equal right to talk and discourse without threat. Boyd (1991) claimed transformative learning can be facilitated using group experience. Daloz and Daloz (1999) claimed that a good relationship between learners and educators can facilitate learning. While the past research have identified different factors to facilitate transformative learning (Table 20), it has only discussed transformative learning from an individual perspective. However, based on the interviews of the 12 interviewees, it has identified that all participants can play a critical role in facilitating transformative learning. Transformative learning can be interpreted from more collective aspects.

#### *7.2.3.1 The Learners as partners and mentors*

Many interviewees have mentioned that the most challenging, but also the most valuable part of the EMBA learning is group project discussion. In fact, a factor that blocks students to gain the transformative values is the “uncompromised” students. As many EMBA participants are business leaders, they may be used to place order instead of listening to the opinions of the

others. One or more facilitators or peacemakers must be in the group to settle the disputes among group members. Uncompromising group members will not only ruin the spirit of the group, but also block the open and honest discussion. Consequently, the process of transformative learning will be blocked. So, relationships among students have played a critical role in providing an environment for transformative learning.

#### *7.2.3.2 A trustworthy learning network with small class*

As mentioned, transformative learning can occur in a group learning environment, but the past research has not addressed how the group learning environment can facilitate transformative learning. Mezirow (2000) have identified that the learning atmosphere should be non-threatening and every participant should have the equal right to express themselves. This research has gained deeper insights on how to set up a non-threatening learning environment. It is found that the composition and the size of the group have played also an important role in the process of transformative learning. Students are willing to share and exchange because a trustworthy learning network is formed during their EMBA learning journey. The network has become a trustworthy network because the size of the cohort is small and hence facilitate more in-depth exchanges. More importantly, while the EMBA students have diversified learning experiences, they respect each other's expertise and leadership. Consequently, transformation has occurred because of the same size class setting. Unlike the past research, this research has identified the importance of the role of group learning in the transformation process.

#### *7.2.3.3 Team with high spirit in learning*

To get the best out of the group discussion, the whole team must share the same values and keep up the positive spirit. In fact, many interviewees have mentioned that the spirit of the group depends strongly on the spirit of each individual member. Therefore, participants must have an open mind to accept others with diversified background. Participants with different background can stimulate each other as their experiences may also be quite different. However, participants may not listen to opposite opinions as they are all business leaders. So, a trustworthy learning network with high spirit in learning is essential in group discussion and transformative learning.

To establish and maintain the trust among team members, it is identified that the class should be small and participants are from different industries to avoid conflict of interest.

#### 7.2.4 Participants' Profile

As mentioned before, this research has found out that even though most of the interviewees do not expect to be transformed, transformative learning can occur with the right transformative environment and the right experiences. However, the occurrence of transformative learning can be affected by (i) past education experience (ii) past work experience (iii) learning attitude and (iv) expectation and motivation. Even though the past research (Chapter 2) has discussed how transformative learning can be facilitated, it does not tell how the profiles of individual is related to transformative learning. For instance, Mezirow (2000)'s ten steps for transformative learning is individual based. Cranton (1994a, 1994b, 2000) has asserted that transformation depends on the individual's critical reflection. Dirkx (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2012a, 2012b) believed that transformation can occurs through different types of individual experiences.

Based on the data collected, it is found that participants with high education will not appreciate about learning frameworks especially those who have gone through similar training before. However, for non-degree holders, they appreciate more to learn about the business frameworks as they have been using their own experiences in making business decisions without structured tools. However, non-degree holders have the motivation to affirm their experiences only, and they may be reluctant to accept new knowledge and skills. So, the effect of education may be positive or negative depending on the motivation and the learning attitude of the participants.

Participants' experiences can play a role in facilitating transformative learning. As mentioned before, participants with the authority to apply what they have learned may have the advantage over the others as they can apply the knowledge and skills in their working environment. Hence, they can experience the impact of what they have learned in the EMBA program.

After all, transformative learning will work well when the participants are more ready to change. So, the learning attitudes which are related to the motivations and expectations of the

participants can affect the outcomes of transformative learning. For those participants whose motivations are just to get a degree to be recognized as professional managers, they may not be open to change their mind set or values. However, for those who are in the crossroad of their life and intend to search for an answer in the EMBA program, they are generally more ready to accept new ideas as they expect EMBA can renew their life. In other words, motivation, expectation and learning attitude are interrelated with each other and can facilitate or block transformative learning.

### 7.3 Contribution to Designing other Graduate Programs

For the graduate programs of other disciplines, similar kind of approaches can be used to transform their students if transformation is a learning outcome that a program wants to drive. For instance, master programs specialized in different areas such as marketing or finance. Within these programs, students can be transformed through interacting with others including professors and students. However, the limitation of these programs is that they may all be from the same professions and their experiences are quite similar whereas EMBA students are from different industries and they may be more likely to be triggered by some incidents or events that they have never encountered before. On the other hand, there are graduate programs that are design for conversion purpose. That is, those taught graduate programs that target those who want to switch their careers. For instance, an English graduate may want to become a marketer. Even though this English graduate may have limited experiences in marketing, the conversion program in Marketing may accept him or her if the student aims to switch career. In other words, conversion based programs may admit students from different industries. In summary, programs other than EMBA program can also apply the insights gained in this research as the program setting and environment are similar for transformative learning. That is, the results can be much more widely applied.

## 7.4 Recommendations

### 7.4.1 Recruitment Process

Different universities will have different recruitment strategies and criteria to recruit EMBA students. However, as valuable exchanges are based on trust, conflict of interest should be avoided. To achieve this, it should start at the recruitment process. In fact, students from the same industries should be prevented. In particular, if students' corporations are direct competitors, it is challenging for them to share their experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that students should be recruited from different industries and companies that are not direct competitors. Also, students should be reminded that they are all equal and everyone should feel free to express their opinions. Just like what Mezirow has mentioned, one critical condition for transformative learning is that students should be free from fear and not under coercion whenever they want to share their ideas.

### 7.4.2 Expectation Management

As mentioned previously, students' expectation and motivation may be quite different from what they have gained. For those who are at the crossroad of their career or life, they are ready to change or to be transformed. However, most of participants may just expect to have instrumental learning. That is, they just want to gain some skills and knowledge, so that they can perform better in their own working environment. This phenomenon is not hard to understand as the learning experiences of interviewees are dominantly instrumental learning even up to the college level. Additionally, students are adult learners who have been educated in a more traditional approach. For those non-degree holders, they have no exposure in higher education and may not know what to expect regarding the outcomes and pedagogy. They are here just to get the qualification so that they can get affirmation from the others such as their boss and colleagues. Therefore, a careful expectation management should be done during the orientation. Consequently, they will be more ready to accept new ideas and experiences with an open mind.



### 7.4.3 Class Design

One common design for EMBA program is that students have close encounter for at least 18 to 24 months as part-time students. That is, they will be in the program for a long duration and therefore, have to understand and interact with each other. Consequently, the trust level can be gradually built up among themselves. They all study together within the same cohort. That is, they will meet the same group of students for most of the classes if they follow closely to the preset schedule of the EMBA program resulting in a bonding that is much stronger. More importantly, the class size of the interviewees is small. It ranges from 12 up to 30. That is, all students can have excellent opportunities to express and exchange their point of views and experiences. Therefore, small class is essential and may even be necessary to ensure that the best values can be provided, that is, primarily the transformative learning experiences.

### 7.4.4 Pedagogy

As mentioned before, EMBA is a type of adult learning. Therefore, all good practices proposed by different researchers should be considered. In this study, the results showed that the interviewees are not only just fond of interaction and group discussion. Many of them did mention that they treasured the experiences when they studied abroad at University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley). The reason behind is that they do not just learn new knowledge and skill, they want to experience learning in a world class prestigious University. So, learning from a overseas prestigious University serve different purposes. They include (i) to expand their exposure to different pedagogy and culture (ii) to gain a new identity as now they can claim that they are once students in a prestigious University and (iii) strengthen their relationships as they have to team more closely in a foreign culture.

The residential trip which requires them to finish a consultant project within ten days in a foreign country is also eye-opening. For those senior executives who may not have a chance to apply what they learn, they can see the power of the knowledge and skills that they have acquired. Moreover, they have to team work very closely and cannot spend too much time on debating and discussion. So, they have to learn how to comprise and rely on the other teammates.

If anyone dictates the project and keep his own views, the project cannot be completed in time.

#### 7.4.5 Group Project Management

In this study, different interviewees have mentioned that they have played different roles in different projects based on their expertise and experiences. However, Bob mentioned that one practice that they find precious in his cohort is that all team members are randomly grouped based on a lottery process. With this practice, students will learn teamwork with people with different personality and working style. As a result, they can find out how to teamwork with various individuals in a learning environment and get ready to face different people issues in the real world.

#### 7.4.6 Informal Learning

Relationship building cannot solely rely on the formal curriculum. For some learners, they are more willing to share in informal setting. For instance, some mentioned that they would rather do their group projects in their own companies or even home. They also treasure experiences that can expand their horizon no matter if it is inside or outside the classroom.

Informal gathering has been a tradition to many EMBA programs. However, some EMBA programs have the tradition to have course end dinners or the appreciation dinner to show their gratefulness to their classmates and professors. In fact, it is also an excellent opportunity to review and exchange what they have learned in the class. As many students are actually business owners and senior executives, it is quite possible and valuable for them to visit each other's company.

For short term executive training or education programs, similar learning setting and environment can be used to facilitate transformative learning. These programs usually share some common feature of EMBA programs. Students or participants are recruited from different industries with diversified education and working experiences. Usually, they will be asked to

conduct group activities together with various people. However, the training duration is usually short ranging from a few hours to a few days. Nevertheless, research has shown that transformative learning can occur even the overall duration of learning is not as long as EMBA program. So, the insights gained in the research may also be applied in executive programs.

## 7.5 Limitations of the Research

### 7.5.1 The Sample

While the interviewees have shown cooperative attitudes in answering all the questions, one major limitation is that they are all from the same EMBA program. As a result, the insights gained might not apply to other EMBA programs as different EMBA programs have different positioning. Though many prestigious Universities claim that they can transform the learners, many other EMBA programs still focus on knowledge and skills transfer. In other words, the insights may be applied to taught postgraduate programs with similar positioning and student profiles.

### 7.5.2 The Profile of the Interviewees

The interviewees have been graduated for at least 4 years. In other words, they should really have a good understanding of the values of the EMBA programs on their lives. More importantly, they can tell if transformation has occurred on them personally. However, for those who have been graduated for many years, their memory may fade away, and the information provided may not accurately reflected what had actually happened in detail. Follow up questions were probed to help interviewees recalled the details of their experiences.

### 7.5.3 The Relationship between the Interviewees and Interviewer.

As the EMBA director of the interviewees before, I have gained a high trust level with the interviewees. On the other hand, they may try to avoid sharing any negative experiences that

may embarrass me. Moreover, I am so familiar with their learning journey and experiences; I may interpret their experiences subjectively. However, to rectify the situation, I have reviewed the major points with them after each interview. For the pilots, I have also invited another EMBA professor to review the transcripts to ensure that I have not subjectively embraced my own interpretation.

#### 7.5.4 The Self-Report Interview

Though interviewees were willing to share their EMBA learning experiences, the data was collected through self-reporting process. The main strength of self-report allows interviewees to more freely to describe what they have encountered in the EMBA learning journey. However, interviewees may not respond truly. For those interviewees who have graduated a long time ago, they may only have a vague impression about what they have experience before. It may also be possible that they do not want to say something negative in front of me. They may consider that they should not say something negative about the program as they are part of the alumni network and a “product” of the program.

#### 7.5.5 The Data Source of the Research

The data collected are from the interviewees who have graduated from the same program. That is, their experiences may only represent a certain types of EMBA programs. Though the setting and the content of the program has been reviewed continually through external reviewers, each EMBA program is unique and may be different from the others. Some insights gained may be just gained when similar learning setting and environment are implemented. For instance, many EMBA program may have more than 100 students in each cohort.

### 7.6 Conclusion

Throughout the last 40 years, since the first EMBA program developed by University of

Chicago has been established, both positive and negative criticisms have been identified. Nevertheless, the actual overall contributions of EMBA programs have not been evaluated from a holistic approach. In particular, very limited research has been identified that talked about the value of transformative learning provided by the EMBA program.

This research has identified the values and contribution of the EMBA program from multiple angles including instrumental learning, communicative learning, and transformative learning. In particular, this research has identified the extent of transformation through the EMBA program in the context of the education environment in Hong Kong.

Most of the interviewees have very straight forward motivations and expectations before they join the program, and they are looking for new knowledge and skills that can solve problems and provide them with insights to plan for the future. Nevertheless, they find that the program has created life-long impact for them. In fact, eleven elements other than new knowledge and skills acquired have been identified. Many articles did mention that the motivations of the EMBA learners were: (i) knowing “what” (ii) knowing “who” and (iii) and “knowing why”. It is agreed by all the interviewees that all EMBA learners have acquired new skills and knowledge. They have even changed the perspectives and habit of thinking of the learners. More importantly, they now have a new framework to understand and analyze business in a structured manner. However, the previous literature (Chapter 2) did not mention that trustworthy relationship could be established through the two years’ EMBA learning journey. In fact, the interviewees claimed that they have developed honest relationship with the others.

Even some articles have mentioned about the twelve subthemes piece by piece in different papers, the conditions that facilitate transformative learning and the challenges that block transformative learning to occur have not been mentioned. For instance, Long (2004) has pointed out that the value of EMBA for the learners is to fulfill their individual goal rather than the corporate goal. Hay and Hodgkinson (2009) has mentioned that the MBA program can boost up the confidence of the learners. Chia and Holt (2008) has mentioned MBA is an identity demonstrating the capacity of the learners. However, there were not in depth analysis on how transformative learning can be facilitated or blocked when learners are going through the EMBA learning journey. In this research, five subthemes that facilitate transformative learning

and four elements that block the transformative learning to be occurred have been identified. A critical point that this research has identified is that the entrepreneurs have a better chance to be transformed as they can apply what they learn without blocking by the other stakeholders.

More importantly, most of the articles just talked about the outcomes of the EMBA program, but have seldom discussed how and why these outcomes occur. In this research, it is identified that the motivation and expectations of the learners are quite related to the outcomes. In fact, it is noted that most of the learners just expected to get a solution to the specific problem that they are facing. However, when they are asked the about the values of the EMBA program, they talked about outcomes that go beyond their expectation. Most of them shared that the EMBA program has created life impact to them. This explained why EMBA program can still charge high tuition fees even when many researchers claimed that the EMBA program is not training better managers for the work environment. From a more personal point of view, the value of the EMBA program is much more than performing better in the work environment even though all interviewees have acquired new skills and knowledge from the Professors and classmates.

The research results challenge some current EMBA curriculum design. As the research echoes that transformative learning occurs in a trust and honest learning environment, it is doubtful if a large class can be conducted without having conflicts among students. The interviewees mentioned quite a number of times that they treasure learning from other classmates and they have even become their sources of business intelligences. However, the general practices of EMBA program is not small class learning, but large class lectures. This is due to the fact that people believe they can strengthen their social capital by knowing more people. However, from a transformative learning point of view, honest opinions may be blocked due to high potential conflicts in a large class.

For those EMBA programs that position themselves as sources of transformation, this research has provided insights how an EMBA program can be design to facilitate learners to be transformed.

## 7.7 Further Research

While this study has identified the values and meaning of the EMBA program to the students, all interviewees are conducted with the users or the students. It is lacking the view and insights from the Professors and administrators who are also stakeholders of the whole learning process. Additionally, the interviewees are all from Hong Kong and no comparison have been done with EMBA students from other countries. This research is qualitative based. Even though insights about the values and meaning of the EMBA programs have been gained, the results cannot be generalized or quantified. It will be valuable if the extent of the insight gained can be measured using a quantitative instrument so that the impact of different improvement suggestions of the EMBA programs can be implemented.

In terms of the scope of the research, I have only collected data from an EMBA program from Hong Kong. Different insights may further be gained through conducting research in Asian countries such as China and Singapore. As the results are generated from the EMBA learners, it is interesting to study other programs with similar characteristics. For instance, executive education programs that assemble the learning approach of EMBA programs except that the duration of the learning usually does not last for more than a week. Similarly, these programs are also design for executives with high social status, and the tuition fee is also getting higher and higher. In other words, there are still many research in the areas of executive education to be explored.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Questions

### Opening Introduction

***Hi\_\_\_\_\_, thanks very much for accepting our invitation to be interviewed. Here comes my business card for your reference!***

***All information will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purpose. The interview will last for 60-80 mins. To assure anonymous, your name will not be mentioned in my research work or potential publication.***

### Questions to be asked

#### Profiles of the Interviewee

1. Would you share with us what your current job title and responsibilities are?
2. Would you tell me about your job responsibilities and work experiences before you join the EMBA program?
3. How about your learning experiences and academic qualification?

#### Motivation and Expectation of the Interviewee

4. What trigger/motivate you to study an EMBA degree?
5. Have you thought about studying other graduate degrees?
6. What are your criteria and channels to get the information of the program?
7. How did you choose the “right” EMBA program?
8. What do you expect to gain thru the EMBA program?

#### Learning Journey of EMBA Program (How do they learn?)

9. How would you describe your EMBA learning process/journey?
10. Do you find that the teaching and learning approaches are quite different from your expectation? How?
11. What are the challenges that you have encountered? How do you overcome them?
12. What the delivery approaches you find the most beneficial to your learning? Why?
13. EMBA Professors usually assigns many group projects to students, how do you like it?

14. How do you deal with other team members with diversified talents in your group? What is your usual role in a team?

#### What are the values and meaning of EMBA

15. Would you give us a memorable example/incidents that your EMBA programs? How do those incidents impact your company performance/career/life, if any?
16. Would you share with me an incident/incidents that has (have) changed your perspectives or habit of thinking, if any? How and why?
17. What is the value and meaning (impact) of the EMBA program to you (such as your career, your management style or life), your company or related people (such as your family and your friends)?

#### Overall Evaluation of the EMBA Program

18. Is it worthy to spend so much money to study EMBA? Why?
19. How would you describe the overall experience of the EMBA program?
20. Would you recommend the EMBA programs to the others? If so, what would you share with them about your EMBA program?

#### Wrap Up

21. Are there any other things you would like to share with me regarding about your EMBA learning journey?

#### Closing

***Thanks very much \_\_\_\_\_ for your time and sharing. I will consolidate the information of the interview today. To assure there is no miscommunication, I would like you to review the transcript after the consolidation!***

***Should there be any questions, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.***

## Appendix 2: Sample of Transcript of Interview

### Interviewee01: Tommy

(the yellow highlights showed the codes that had identified)

ROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWEE	
1. <i>Would you share with us what your current job title and responsibilities are?</i>	<p>I am now working in a private educational firm named BWC Financial Education. I am the Program Director.</p> <p>I was a technical man! My first job was working in the NEC, handling internal IT related stuff... and, finally I was promoted as the Engineer Supervisor. Afterwards, I was placed in the Market Development Department handling marketing works related to HK and Mainland market. Progressively, I was promoted as the Department Manager (<b>new job</b>) of the Computer &amp; Network Group. My responsibility area was the marketing development work of computer and peripheral products in Hong Kong and China.</p>
2. <i>Would you tell me about your job responsibilities and work experiences before you join the EMBA program?</i>	
3. <i>How about your learning or academic experieces?</i>	<p>At that time, 1978, China recruited students from HK and Macau, I sat in the National College Entrance Examination (□ □ □ □ ). Luckily, I got an offer in the university. I studied Physics (BSc) in Jinan University. Before this, I studied in Hong Kong. It was a Chinese Secondary School. (Is it the reason you went back to China to have your graduate study?) Not necessarily related! Actually, it was mainly a money matter (<b>financial issue</b>). At that time, I did not have much money for my study. If I study in China, I didn't need to pay any tuition fee; living expenses and other stuff were also very low. I think it only needed around a thousand dollars for me to study there for almost half a year.</p> <p>Besides that, NEC provided me a lot of on the job training;(<b>corporate training in a Japanese company</b>) like the "Overseas Managers Program" and the "Business Process Re-engineering".</p> <p>After EMBA, I joined the IBM. I joined serval internal training programs; like the Project Management training which was conducted by The George Washington University, the IBM Manager Development</p>

	<p>Program, it was a train the trainer program, I also joined the e-Business Management program in Singapore, and the Solution Sales Training in Hong Kong. After left IBM, I joined another program, the Activity-Based Cost Management which is organized by ABC Technologies, USA.</p>
MOTIVATION AND EXPECTATION OF THE INTERVIEWEE	
<p>4. <i>What trigger/motivate you to study an EMBA degree?</i></p> <p>5. <i>Have you thought about studying other graduate degrees?</i></p>	<p>It is because... at that time, I was transferring from a technical to a management post, <b>(new role &amp; disorientation dilemma)</b> from taking care of a small team of technical guys to managing a department with people from different professions and different backgrounds. I didn't know how to manage the department. Also, I had to oversee the Mainland and the Hong Kong market. The market was changing <b>(challenges in new working role)</b> rapidly, but I didn't know how to tackle it. You have to deal with dealers and distributors of different sizes from the market... I knew that I was not good enough to manage it... and I thought I should have to further my study to improve myself in a more systematic way. <b>(learning systematically)</b> It thought I better went back to school to learn.</p> <p>No, I was quite clear and direct. At that moment, I didn't know how to manage the business, therefore the EMBA program should be helpful. Once, I had thought about a technical degree, but regarding to my work in the NEC, I thought that my technical skill was good enough.</p> <p><i>(But there were quite a number of EMBA &amp; MBA programs in the market, why you pick this one?)</i></p> <p>At that time, my work was quite busy. Some of the top universities in town I even wouldn't try at all. Some others, I would doubt their quality. At that time, it was just the first EMBA conducted by the City U, therefore it had no track record but, at that time, the Business School here was already got a good reputation, also the location and the time schedule was really suitable for me.</p> <p><i>(At that time, did you have any expectation, or what did</i></p>

	<p><i>you want from the program?)</i></p> <p>I expected I can learn how to manage the whole business system in a very systematic way. <b>(systematic learning)</b> This was what I really wanted. Other than that, I didn't know much, therefore I didn't have too much expectation.</p> <p><i>(You had already completed the program. How do you describe your EMBA journey?)</i></p> <p>Very tough, very interesting, but it was worth joining. <i>(why?)</i> When I was studying the program, my son was only one year old, I had to take care of the family and household stuff. My wife was suffering a lot, but I couldn't help much. As a person growing up from the technical stream, I didn't know much about business management. I had to read a lot more than others in order to improve my basic knowledge in this area. <b>(personal challenge/disorientation)</b> I really needed a lot of time to catch up with the progress. As a manager, I had always needed to work or to join social activities until midnight. It was really a great challenge to decide whether going to sleep or opening the book to have some reading when you came home after your midnight.</p> <p><i>(then how about your interest in the program?)</i></p> <p>During the study I saw something I had never come across before; some from the process of studying and some from my classmates; <b>(gradually transformed/new perspectives)</b> something really new to me, it really broadened my horizon.</p> <p><i>(how about the teaching method?)</i></p> <p>Actually I had no idea about the teaching method before I joined the program. At the beginning, it was more or less the same. But, after a while, we had discussions and group work, I learnt much from these activities; especially the summer consultation project <b>(group consultation)</b> we did in Shanghai. It was very good; practical and a very useful experience.</p> <p>The biggest challenge was time <b>(under time constraint)</b>. It was very difficult to squeeze out some time from the working schedule. I remembered that,</p>
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	we had to read the text book as well as some reference books every month for every subject, it was almost impossible for me. How to overcome... My thought was; "I was really lucky to get the chance, so get over it, try hard..." it was the only way.
LEARNING JOURNEY OF EMBA PROGRAM (HOW DO THEY LEARN?)	
6. <i>What are your criteria and channels to get the information of the program?</i>	<p>To learn something really useful. Since the pressure at work was quite high, lecture durations &amp; schedules, convenient transport are all in my consideration.</p> <p>It was just the first EMBA in City U, but since the Business School there was not bad .... Also, the schedule and transport (<b>convenience</b>) was just what I wanted.</p>
7. <i>How did you choose the "right" EMBA program?</i>	<p>Just as my answer in the previous question, I wanted to learn more, so that I can manage my department and people better. (<b>better management</b>)</p>
8. <i>What do you expect to gain thru the EMBA program?</i>	<p>(Which part(s) of the EMBA benefit you most?) I really got a complete understanding of the whole business system, and based on this I built up my confidence.(improve confidence) And during the process, through the interaction with peer group, I really knew that the World is so big, so many different ideas... this made me think in different ways. (<b>new habits of thinking</b>)</p>
9. <i>How would you describe your EMBA learning process/journey?</i>	<p>Very Good! Learning partners, teachers, both with good quality. It was tough, but with great harvest!</p> <p>Actually, I didn't know much about how other Universities were doing at that moment. At first, I just attended lectures, did the reading, and the assignments... Until summer, I started to feel the difference...</p>
10. <i>Do you find that the teaching and learning approaches are quite different from your expectation? How?</i>	<p>Compared with other students, my foundation was quite weak. Furthermore, I didn't have enough time to study... it was tough. My son was just one year old, my wife was in a really difficult situation. (<b>limited timing</b>) There was a crisis in my corporation, the business was tough. Sometimes, when I went home at mid-night, I would question myself, should I do some reading? Should I hurry up and finish my assignment? There was</p>

<p>11. <i>What are the challenges that you have encountered? How do you overcome them?</i></p> <p>12. <i>What the delivery approaches you find the most beneficial to your learning? Why?</i></p> <p>13. <i>EMBA Professors usually assigns many group projects to students, how do you like it?</i></p> <p>14. <i>How do you deal with other team members with diversified talents in your group? What is your usual role in a team?</i></p>	<p>great pressure both mentally and physically. But, anyway, I tried my best!</p> <p>Group discussion, group project and summer project, as I can learn the real experience from my classmate. <i>(real experience from group project)</i></p> <p>If we all were in high spirit, good attitudes, group projects were good. But sometimes, when the team members were busy, the situations were terrible. <i>(time constraint)</i></p> <p>Every classmate got one's talent. We all need respect for each other. If one can, then do a bit more, if not, try to learn more... Friendship is the most valuable thing.</p> <p><i>(How you feel group project?)</i> It all depended on the situation of your team members at that particular moment. Sometimes we really benefit from each other. Since most students are well experienced and have their ways of doing things, you can really learnt from them. But, sometimes ... most students were too busy... it was really problematic. <i>(challenge to learning – too busy)</i></p> <p><i>(So, how you handle these situations?)</i> If possible, I tried a bit more and made it better whenever we could. I didn't had a fixed role during group work, sometimes as a supporter sometime as a leader, but it was great that members always tried to let me did what I was good at. <i>(different role play at group project)</i></p>
WHAT ARE THE VALUES AND MEANING OF EMBA	
<p><i>Would you give us a memorable example/incidents that</i></p>	<p><i>(What was your most unforgettable case?)</i> Quite a lot! One case happened in the first program I studied, organization behavior. We were studying</p>

<p><i>your EMBA programs? How do those incidents impact your company performance/career/life, if any?</i></p>	<p>Matrix structure. I had already worked in a Japanese firm for several decades, most of my clients were national corporates in China. I had never met any company running Matrix structure. Therefore, I doubted whether it existed in the real world. At that time, I asked my classmates. The result was all classmates raised up their hands. Then, I understood I was dumb and needed to learn in a very sincere manner. <b>(Needs to learn – triggering event)</b></p>
<p><i>Would you share with me an incident/incidents that has (have) changed your perspectives or habit of thinking, if any? How and why?</i></p>	<p>After completing the EMBA, some classmates introduced me to a company which is using the Matrix structure to manage. It was really lucky that I had learnt it before, so I didn't have much trouble. I really learned the World is much bigger than I thought.</p> <p>Afterwards, when I learned "profit service chain", I suddenly felt everything fitted into positions; all I learned became linked up in a chain. <b>(integration of different management perspectives)</b></p>
<p><i>What is the value and meaning (impact) of the EMBA program to you (such as your career, your management style or life), your company or related people (such as your family and your friends)?</i></p>	<p><i>(how about to your personal life?)</i></p> <p>In my case, most of them were about career. Another example was the summer project. It was a trip to Beijing, a group project. Before that, all we learnt was "virtual", from text books, from lectures. But this one was different, a real company, real suggestions, and comments by real clients... It was a complete method to do consultation. <b>(real consultation)</b> Afterwards, when I was working for those big firms, like China Mobile, I can really use the same method. It was just amazing that what we learnt really worked...</p> <p><i>(So the EMBA program change the attributes, the perspective, and how you look at the work, look at your job, do you know how)</i></p> <p>I remembered at that time I learnt a subject, "profit service chain". Before this I felt what I learnt were parts and parts. But after that, it seems to me that all matters flowed into one piece, everything flow into positions; all I learnt become chained up. It was much clearer. At that moment, I found that we can read things and things by some "framework". It was really beneficial for me. <b>(framework – habit of thinking)</b></p>

OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE EMBA PROGRAM	
<p><i>Is it worthy to spend so much money to study EMBA? Why?</i></p> <p><i>How would you describe the overall experience of the EMBA program?</i></p> <p><i>Would you recommend the EMBA programs to the others? If so, what would you share with them about your EMBA program?</i></p>	<p><i>(Value and meaning)</i> Let me put it this way... At that time, I just wanted to have a new car, and, the tuition fee was more or less comparable to a Toyota Camry. Finally, I didn't bought a new car but changed my brain. <b>(personal development)</b></p> <p>I learned to see things in a new way, I knew much more than before, I got confidence and also more friends... Whenever facing new challenges, I got more confidence. <b>(confidence to face future challenges)</b></p> <p><i>(Any change to your management style)</i> Sure, before this I just knew that I was a team leader, like a parent, I had to protect my subordinates, if they couldn't finish a task I had to come out to help in time. After the program, I learned much more about people; people are different; communication can be different. No matter what culture and what background you are from, the working relationships are not just limited to hen and chicken. <b>(appreciation of new relationship/new perspectives about diversity)</b></p> <p>Afterwards, when I was working in IBM, everyone is just a screw in the whole system; no hen, no chicken... If you didn't attend the EMBA program, when I moved from a Japanese firm, NEC to an American Firm, IBM; I thought it was quite impossible for me to adapt to the change.</p> <p><i>(so, the program not just broadened your horizon, it also prepared the path for your career development...)</i> Not just for career, but even in my family life. We led a harmonious life, I didn't know the relation in between, but it definitely helped. <b>(new relationship with others)</b></p> <p>Also, my friends, most of them are friends in EMBA. They helped me a lot after the program. Especially when I was facing crisis afterward.</p> <p><i>(So, it is the change, the change in the relationship with other people...) (is it worth joining?)</i> Definitely! It is worth joining! The most important part is: it changed the view of a working adult. <b>(new perspectives)</b> I myself had already been working in the</p>

	<p>field for more than twenty years, but still able to change, it is really valuable. EMBA provided a chance for one to re-understand oneself, to re-understand the World. <i>(self reflection &amp; relationship with the outer world)</i></p> <p>I had recommended the EMBA program to a lot of my friends. As far as I could remember, at least one of them took the CityU EMBA. My word to this program is; this is the best way to smoothen your road to success, the best way to give you confidence to deal with difficulties.</p>
WRAP UP	
<p><i>Are there any other things you would like to share with me regarding about your EMBA learning journey?</i></p>	<p>If I were to make the choice again today, I would still pick the program but not the car. <i>(value of EMBA)</i></p>
CLOSING	

### Appendix 3: Original Themes & Code

Code	Code Name	Basic Themes	Theme Code
1.	source of different exposure and opportunities	Source of opportunies	Value of EMBA
2.	Witness of transformation	Pecieved value	Perceived values
3.	Face job challenge	Face challenge	Face challenge
4.	Face life challenge	Face challenge	Face challenge
5.	Learning atmosphere	Atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
6.	Closely learn from Prof & experts	Interaction with partners	Facilitate learning/transformation
7.	A student can be more knowledgeable than a professor	Learning atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
8.	Argue with Professor	Learning atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
9.	Caring of professors	Learning atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
10.	Communicate and access with professors	Learning atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
11.	Free discussion without hierarchy with the professors	Learning atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
12.	Relationship between Professors and students	Learning Atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
13.	Singing to show caring and loving	Learning atmosphere	Facilitate learning/transformation
14.	The motivation of enrolling into the EMBA	Learning attitude	Facilitate learning/transformation
15.	Division of labor – support by teammates	Learning partners support	Facilitate learning/transformation

16.	Close to Henry Mintzberg Approach	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
17.	Cross-discipline applications	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
18.	Group projects	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
19.	Group projects outside classroom	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
20.	Highly interactive problem solving activities	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
21.	Pedagogy	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
22.	Residential Trips	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
23.	R-trips	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
24.	R-trips	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
25.	Unique teaching methods	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
26.	Using non-tradition pedagogy	Pedagogy	Facilitate learning/transformation
27.	Opportunities of applying the learned skills and knowledge	Practice the learned	Facilitate learning/transformation
28.	The scope of responsibilities in the company	Practice the learned	Facilitate learning/transformation
29.	Managing team with diversified talents	Team management	Facilitate learning/transformation
30.	Consultancy trip in short time	Work under pressure	Facilitate learning/transformation
31.	A change of social identity	Identity changed	Identity change

32.	New Identity (family & friends)	Identity in family	Identity change
33.	New Identity (work)	Identity in work	Identity change
34.	Build social network	general social network	Knowing who
35.	brings you life-long network	lifelong network	Knowing who
36.	It brings you life-long network	lifelong network	Knowing who
37.	New social circle	new social network	Knowing who
38.	Interact with people outside their own business areas	outside business social network	Knowing who
39.	Subjects apply in daily work	Applied in daily work	Knowledge & Skills
40.	Business Skills & Knowledge	business knowledge	Knowledge & Skills
41.	China Business	business knowledge	Knowledge & Skills
42.	Knowledge application	Knowledge application	Knowledge & Skills
43.	Knowledge spectrum	Knowledge spectrum	Knowledge & Skills
44.	Communication/presentation skills	Leadership skills	Knowledge & Skills
45.	Communication/presentation skills	Leadership skills	Knowledge & Skills
46.	Managment is not just skills and knowledge, it is a holistic leadership training	Leadership skills	Knowledge & Skills
47.	Professional Skills & Knowledge	professional knowledge	Knowledge & skills
48.	Connection is the least, it is a real leadership training	Leadership skills	Knowledge and skills
49.	Family support	Family support	Learning Challenge
50.	Costing	High tuition fee	Learning Challenge
51.	Tutorial with Prof and Students	Learning atmoshpere	Learning challenge



52.	Finish one subject each month	Learning atmosphere	Learning challenge
53.	MBA students are too young and too mature	Learning partners	Learning Challenge
54.	Strong Characters	Learning partners	Learning challenge
55.	Get teamwork and classmate work together	Teamwork	Learning challenge
56.	Read Textbook and Reference	Time maangement	Learning challenge
57.	Class schedule	Time management	Learning Challenge
58.	Difficult to fit in the academic work	Time management	Learning challenge
59.	Fitting the life pattern	Time management	Learning Challenge
60.	Hard working	Time management	Learning challenge
61.	Location	Time management	Learning Challenge
62.	Time management (family, work and study)	Time management	Learning challenge
63.	Work pattern	Time management	Learning Challenge
64.	Difficult to learn IT and computing work	Unfamiliar subject	Learning challenge
65.	Presentation in 3 mins	Unfamiliar subject	Learning challenge
66.	Subject without Prior Knowledge	Unfamiliar subject	Learning challenge
67.	Subjects don't know what happen	Unfamiliar subject	Learning challenge
68.	It's a beginning	Beginning	Learning journey
69.	The two-year learning journey was so enjoyable and I am glad and grateful that I have joined this journey	Enjoyable	Learning journey
70.	Interesting journey	Interesting	Learning journey
71.	A positive life mile stone	Description of EMBA	Life impact

72.	It is a life mile stone	Description of EMBA	Life impact
73.	It is a transformation journey,	Description of EMBA	Life impact
74.	Better job performance	Job performance	Life impact
75.	New direction of life	Life impact	Life impact
76.	Find New life direction	Life impact	Life impact
77.	Life long values	Life impact	Life impact
78.	Networking should not be the focal point, EMBA is an upgrade, a big step, a quantum jump in your life.	Life impact	Life impact
79.	Rethink my life	Life impact	Life impact
80.	It is a life-long network that you can leverage on	Life long impact	Life impact
81.	Life-long learning network	Lifelong network	Life impact
82.	Management of behavior	Management	Management style
83.	Academic qualification (degree)	Affirmation	Motivation
84.	Business degree	Affirmation	Motivation
85.	Self-affirmation	Affirmation	Motivation
86.	Gap between theory and practice	Affirmation	Motivation
87.	The academic/learning experiences before EMBA	pass learning experience	Motivation
88.	From a TV Anchor to a Consultant	Career transformation	Outcome achieved
89.	A Clear mind, a clean mind	Habit of thinking	Outcome achieved
90.	An open mind of learning	Habit of thinking	Outcome achieved
91.	Mind opening	Habit of thinking	Outcome achieved
92.	Subject needed not offer	Perceived values	Perceived values
93.	Witness of transformation	Perceived values	Perceived values

94.	Not everyone is positive about EMBA, it is because they don't understand what it is and the values behind	Perceived values	Perceived values
95.	The expectation and perception of EMBA	Perceived values	Perceived values
96.	Confidence of value	Outcome achieved	Personal Development
97.	Self-confidence	Outcome achieved	Personal Development
98.	Form bigger vision	Outcome achieved	Personal Development
99.	Depends on the nature of the projects (shared leadership)	Play Different Role	Personal Development
100.	Priority setting	Play Different Role	Personal Development
101.	Personal Development	Self-development	Personal Development
102.	Confidence to overcome the task	Values of EMBA	Personal Development
103.	Priority setting	Values of EMBA	Personal Development
104.	Spiritual insights/sharing outside the classroom	Appreciation of life	Perspectives and habit of thinking
105.	Your appreciation and analysis of things are totally different	Appreciation of things	Perspectives and habit of thinking
106.	Gain system view	Habit of thinking	Perspectives and habit of thinking
107.	Lifelong learning habit	Habit of thinking	Perspectives and habit of thinking
108.	New dimensions of thinking	Habit of thinking	Perspectives and habit of thinking
109.	Stimulate their thinking	Habit of thinking	Perspectives and habit of thinking
110.	The mind set of knowledge transfer (essential what vs. implementation how)	Habit of thinking	Perspectives and habit of thinking

111.	Expand my horizon to look at my expertise (marketing)	Perspective	Perspectives and habit of thinking
112.	New kind of knowledge	Perspectives	Perspectives and habit of thinking
113.	Something New	Perspectives	Perspectives and habit of thinking
114.	Student better than Professor	Perspectives	Perspectives and habit of thinking
115.	Add more dimensions in analyzing an issue	Problem solving	Perspectives and habit of thinking
116.	Analyze a problem with rational argument and consider the implications in the future	Problem solving	Perspectives and habit of thinking
117.	Improving my tool box for solving problems	Problem solving	Perspectives and habit of thinking
118.	Consolidate management experience	Self reflection	Perspectives and habit of thinking
119.	Different ideas from Prof & Text	Self reflection	Perspectives and habit of thinking
120.	Formal study widen perspectives	Self reflection	Perspectives and habit of thinking
121.	Profit Service Chain	Self reflection	Perspectives and habit of thinking
122.	Management in a systematic way	Systematic management	Perspectives and habit of thinking
123.	Play as supporters rather than leaders		Play Different Role
124.	Don't deal with conflicts, just play my role	Learning atmosphere	Play Different Role
125.	Improve in family relationship	family relationship	Relationship with others
126.	more time with LP than family	Family relationship	Relationship with others
127.	Confidence from others	Identity change	Relationship with others

128.	Confidence to delegate	Management change	Relationship with others
129.	Gain confidence	Identity change	Self-development
130.	New Attitude	New habit of thinking	Something New
131.	New ideas for practice	New habit of thinking	Something New
132.	Latest knowledge	New perspective	Something New
133.	Learn New ideas	New perspectives	Something New
134.	New change	New perspectives	Something New
135.	New Horizon	New perspectives	Something New
136.	New View	New perspectives	Something New
137.	Meet New people	Social network	Something New
138.	Gain systematic view	Systematic management	Thinking Pattern
139.	Knowledgeable		Value of EMBA
140.	I gain my money back a few months later after I started my EMBA journey	Financial reward	Value of EMBA
141.	I gain my money back a few months later after I started my EMBA journey	Financial reward	Value of EMBA
142.	Super/Good value for money	High values	Value of EMBA
143.	Change in management style	Management change	Value of EMBA
144.	You encounter things that you have not experienced before	New perspectives	Value of EMBA
145.	You gain the business intelligence and inside stories that people will not share with you in other places	Social status	Value of EMBA
146.	A source of opportunities	Source of opportunities	Value of EMBA

147.	Meeting with new opportunities	Source of opportunities	Value of EMBA
148.	Opportunities of applying the learned skills and knowledge	Source of opportunities	Value of EMBA
149.	Prepare myself to change	transformation	Value of EMBA
150.	Transformation of career and life	transformation	Value of EMBA

## Appendix 4: Research Ethical Form

### **GSoE RESEARCH ETHICS FORM**

**Name(s):** John Leung

**Proposed research project:**

The Contribution of EMBA education to Senior Executives

**Proposed funder(s):** n/a

**Discussant for the ethics meeting:**

Name of supervisor: LISA LUCAS

Has your supervisor seen this submitted draft of your ethics application? Yes

The research questions to be studied are as follows:

- 1) What are the factors motivating people to study an EMBA program and what are the expectations of learners?
- 2) What are the transformative outcomes and to what extent learners may be transformed into the EMBA program?
- 3) What are the critical incidents or process that shape the transformation of EMBA participants?

First, this research provides a holistic view of the values and contributions of EMBA programs from the learners' point of the views instead of evaluating the programs from Professors or management's point of view. In particular, the motivation and expectation of the individual learners will be identified

Secondly, through the experiences of the interviewees, more insights on how adult learnings can be transformed will be gained. The transformative incidents that trigger transformation will be collected. The effectiveness of both formal and informal learning process designed for transformative learning can be evaluated to supplement previous quantitative research.

Thirdly, it is envisioned that with the insights gained in this research, the EMBA curriculum, delivery and marketing strategies can be further improved. The recommendations of the applications of the research are discussed in the last two chapters of this thesis.

**Two pilot interviews and twelve sample interviews have been arranged on September, 2014 till December 2014.**

## **1. Researcher access/exit**

### **Background of Interviewees (Alumni) to be interviewed**

	<b>Business Owner</b>	<b>Senior Executive</b>
<b>Degree holder</b>	2 alumni	4 alumni
<b>Non-degree holder</b>	4 alumni	2 alumni

To avoid any conflict of interests and to ensure that all interviewees have completed the whole EMBA learning journey, interviewees will be selected from the EMBA alumni rather than current students. Three interviewees for each categories as it is expected that there may be diversified opinions among different groups and insights obtained might not be quite different.

## **2. Information given to participants**



As I am familiar with interviewees, I will call them directly and share with them the purpose of my study. Before the start of the interview, I would get their verbal content for audio recording in the whole interview. A list of questions to be asked will be shown before the interview.

I will also assure with them that the information of the interviews used will be used solely for research purpose and will not be used for promotion or other usages. Their participation will be strictly on a voluntary basis and will not affect their relationship with the University at all.

At the beginning of the interview, I will restate the purpose of the research and stated that they can withdraw from the interview at any time. They will be clearly explained that data will be kept strictly confidential.

As Hong Kong people are used to use the mixed mode, namely, Cantonese and English, in daily communication, the translation will not form a hurdle to the interview process.

### **3. Participants right of withdrawal**

The interviewees will be alerted that they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

### **4. Informed consent**

Yes, interviewees are requested to consent verbally and their agreement will be recorded.

### **5. Complaints procedure**

There are email addresses of the researcher, provided in case of the participants want to express

their concerns.

#### **6. Safety and well-being of participants/ researchers**

Not applicable.

#### **7. Anonymity/confidentiality**

The identities of interviewees will be protected by using only pseudonyms and ensure that their opinions will be kept confidential

#### **8. Data collection**

Interviews will be conducted in Cantonese supplemented by English terms whenever necessary. The key points of the interview will be translated into English. The data collected will be destroyed after three years. However, a sample transcribed interview without showing the identity of the participant will be put in the appendix of the dissertation.

#### **9. Data analysis**

Data will be analysed using thematic analysis. Software supporting the analysis may be used.

#### **10. Data storage**

Data will be stored both online and offline and will be protected against the use out the scope of this research.

#### **11. Data Protection Act**

Not applicable.

**12. Feedback**

The participants will be allowed to review the transcripts.

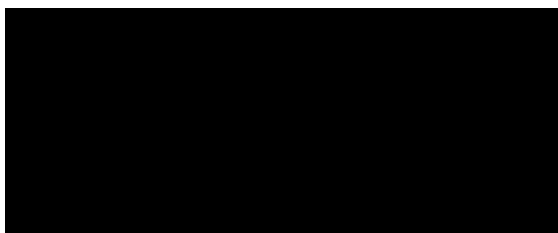
**13. Responsibilities to colleagues/academic community**

Not applicable.

**14. Reporting of research**

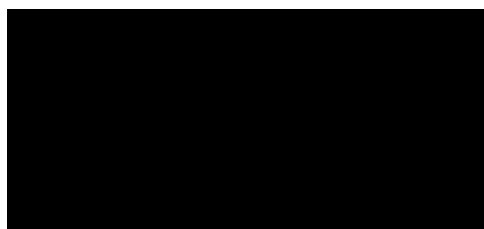
This research will be written in the form of dissertation and possibly publications.

Signed: John Leung (Researcher)

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of John Leung.

Date: Aug 4 , 2014

Signed: Brian Lai (Discussant)

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of Brian Lai.

Aug 6 2014

## Appendix 5: Consent Form

Dear XXX,

### **Informed Consent Form for the Research of “The Contribution of EMBA Education to the Business Leaders in Hong Kong**

I am conducting a research on “The **“The Contribution of EMBA Education to the Business Leaders in Hong Kong”**. The research results will be used to fulfill the partial requirement of Doctorate degree in Education from University of Bristol, UK. This is a qualitative research which will engage in in-depth interview. It is expected that the interview will last between 45 to 60 mins. You are invited to participate in this research and, during your participation, you can opt out of the process at any stage.

The information you provided will be used solely for this research. Your identity will not be released to third parties in the course of and after the research. Also, your identity will be protected in my report by using pseudonym. I will be using an electronic device to record the interview. You can request to pause or stop the conversation during the interview if you feel necessary. By signing this form, you agree and aware of your right as a participant in this research.

You can refer to the information sheet of more details concerning this research. In case you have further questions regarding this research, I can be reached at the following eMail:

edkhbl@bristol.ac.uk

or my research supervisor, Professor Lisa Lucas

lisa.lucas@bristol.ac.uk

Yours truly,

John LEUNG

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_